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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"OH! YOU DEAR OLD JACK, YOU ARE A REAL DARLING!" SHE EXCLAIMED, EXUBERANTLY.

SUNBEAM.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"You here, sir! I am half in mind to punish you by going home without saying good-morning," laughed a fairy-like maiden, as she tripped down the steps of a bathing-machine.

The roses on her cheeks deepened at the rencontre, while her rippling hair, damp with the salt spray, flowed around her shoulders in wild splendour.

"You needn't be so unkind. I assure you that I have been most discreet, and only perched myself on that friendly boulder to woo an appetite for breakfast; when lo! my eyes caught sight of the fairest nymph that ever basked in Neptune's crystal home. It was not my fault

that the temptation to stay," he continued, "overcame me," as he took her soft, rosy hand in his own, and gazed into the blushing face, a dash of mischief in his merry eyes that caused hers to droop shyly.

This was an old trick of Locksley Tringham when near this tantalising Hebe, and usually brought the carnation to her peachy cheeks. But now she disappointed him, out of sheer mischief, by pretending to seek for shells and treasures from the deep, hidden among the silvery white sands.

"Have you lost anything?" he asked, audaciously, just to tease her, and compel her to glance up at him with those bewitching eyes.

"No. I was seeking for some pink seaweed," she answered, demurely.

The summer sun was shining and quivering over the wide expanse of sea at Hastings and also St. Leonards. Its golden beams fell on the handsome pier, on the hills, the fishing-smacks, as they lay at anchor in the bay, on the pleasure skiffs with their gaudily-tinted flags, and on the

brigs, schooners, and big ships that, in full sail, went steadily on their course far out at sea.

There were but few visitors on the Marina, for it was only just on the stroke of eight o'clock when the butterflies of fashion and hypochondriacal invalids were just contemplating leaving their downy beds.

A score or more of merry children, with flushed cheeks and dripping hair, were scampering off along with their nurses to breakfast.

"How is Jack?" he asked.

The sweet mignon face lit up with a radiant smile, and he felt an overpowering impulse to catch her in his arms and strain her to his breast till time was no more.

"Jack! dear old Jack is ever so much better; so much so that I stole out to have my dip earlier than usual, so as to give him all the morning. He is longing to have a morning on the sea, right away out, you know."

"How I envy your brother, afflicted though he is, poor fellow!"

"Why?" she questioned, in surprise.

"Need you ask me such a question? Is he not always with you? Are you not his guide, nurse, companion, all the world to him?" she said, simply. "Think of the happiness it is to be the eyes and guide of Jack. Dear old Jack!"

"If it wasn't that he is your brother, I verily believe I should hate him," Locksley thought, jealously, digging his cane spitefully into the damp sand. "I don't think she considers any fellow good-looking but him. It is Jack here, Jack there, Jack everywhere."

Locksley Tringham need not have felt so hippled at her warm affection for her brother. For she was glancing furtively at him, ever and anon, in a coy, shy manner, and thinking that the only man who rivalled Jack was his good-looking self.

Certainly, too, the little lady was right in her conviction. For he had a tall, shapely figure, a winning courtesy in speech, and a grand head, smothered with soft rings of brown hair that matched his roguish eyes.

A creamy Indian silk morning jacket set off his figure by its very careless grace; and many eyes had danced and—yes, it must be admitted—even winked, to win a smile when he made his appearance on the Marina, in the orthodox hours, or at the assembly rooms, where they would cordially detect each other if one lady received a little more attention than another.

"What does this new doctor say?" he asked, breaking the alliance. "Has he any hope of success in the case?"

"He is so very reticent that we can get no definite answers to our inquiries. It is very vexing," this wistfully.

"Perhaps he is studying the case, and finds it necessary to reserve his opinion till it is developed more to his understanding. No doubt it is a very perplexing one."

"Perhaps so," she assented, with a sigh.

"Come, Rennie! Cheer up, dear! There's no reason for you to despair. You are rich, and this blight is only a few months old. Wealth is power, you know; clever oculists are to be had for money. This one, to wit, who I have heard has made some wonderful cures. Now reverse our position, and I should be in a hopeless plight, for I couldn't afford the great guns of their craft, and neither should I have a sweet, consoling sunbeam for a sister, to love and comfort me in my affliction."

"Fie, fie!" she chided. "An all-wise Creator always compensates us one way or another, whatever our cross may be."

"Pray forgive me, Rennie. I spoke rashly, I hold myself corrected. I am a very clay-like mortal, while you are a sweet little spirit confined in a casket of crystal, pure and unscathed by its short tenure on earth."

"If I remain here much longer I shall get concited," she laughed, rising, and going down to the sun-kissed waves that ebbed and flowed at her feet in tiny musical ripples.

She stooped to pick up an especially pretty piece of seaweed the waves had just washed to her feet.

"Is this not a treasure?" she observed, her face all smiles at her find.

"Will you give it to me?" he asked, eagerly.

"No; because I see another place just as nice if you will stoop and get it."

"Pshaw! what is that, or cartloads of it to me if your pretty hands haven't touched it?"

"Oh, here you are, sir!" she said, archly. "Perhaps you will take this and pick that other piece up for me?"

With alacrity he hastened to obey, and the lovers—for there could be no mistake about their relationship to each other, though they had never confessed their passion—thrust the worthless pieces of sea-flower in their pockets with a show of indifference, to keep them for ever after among their most precious treasures.

"Are you going to the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so," she replied, as she bade him a hurried "good-morning"; and sped like the flash of a sunbeam on a dreary November day from his presence into a gate, which revealed, as she pushed it open, a wilderness of flowers, a

stretch of cool, green lawn where sat in an arm-chair, beneath a wide spreading oak, a handsome youth about eighteen, with a delicate face, the image of his sister.

She bounded towards him and assisted him out of his chair, flanking his arm in a motherly fashion through haws, and led him to the rosebushes, and picked a cluster of dewy buds and thrust them into his hand.

"Has the bell gone yet, Jack?" she asked. "I have hurried in; for you see I have been playing the truant, and the vases are not filled."

"The bell hasn't gone yet, Sis. Do you think grandpa will consent to our going for a sail?"

"I will coax, tease, badger him till he does," she laughed, filling her hands with some passion flowers, fragrant mignonette, and roses and lilies.

"There goes the bell, Rennie!" Jack exclaimed, twining his arm round her slender waist.

And away they hastened to the open French casement, where a table was spread, gleaming with snowy drapery and richly-chased old silver, that caught up the sunbeams and made them dance merrily.

"See, grandpa, what treasures I have brought you!" Rennie said, laying her treasures before an old gentleman who was already seated at the table, unfolding a morning paper—one of England's true specimens of an English gentleman of the old school, from his irreproachable burnished boots to the crown of his silvery head—a keen sportsman, though nearly seventy years of age, and a generous, open-hearted friend even to his dogs.

He kissed the tiny rosy mouth she placed so temptingly near his white moustache, saying, tenderly,—

"You not only bring me flowers, my love, but a sunbeam too," patting her head, which was running over with flowy curls, whose golden tendrils would persist in straying over the broad, white forehead.

"Grandpa," she observed coaxingly, nestling up to him when breakfast was concluded, "will you grant me a favour? Jack wants to go for a sail—do let him; I will take such care of him!"

"It is impossible, pussy, under the circumstances," he said, quietly, feeling sorry to disappoint his pet of any little pleasure she had set her mind upon.

"Old Saunders has promised to accompany us, and you know I can swim like a duck, and could save even Jack if he tumbled overboard," she pleaded.

"Well, since Saunders is going, I suppose I must give in; but please do not practise any of your swimming feats."

"Not for the world, grandpa; I'll be as quiet and select as any old owl!"

And away she flew, nodding her golden head by way of thanks, to impart her glad tidings to the expectant Jack, and also to don her new boating-dress.

As brother and sister were on their way to the beach Locksley joined them.

"Who would have thought of meeting you?" she remarked, innocently. "We are going for a sail; would you like to join us?"

"Of course he would!" put in Jack with alacrity.

And Locksley thought she had never looked so sweet.

He gazed upon the dainty picture, knowing the memory of it would last as long as his life.

"I shall only be too delighted," he assented, flanking his arm in Jack's and assisting him into the smart little craft, whose white plumes were flying merrily in the wind, and brickbat-coloured Saunders beside it, grinning all over his good-natured face.

Away they floated on the blue, dancing waters; the snowy sails flapping and flowing gracefully, while the old skipper looked as proud as a hen over her first brood of chicks.

A glass was proposed, and the three fresh young voices rang out clear and resonant, astonishing the sea-fowl, who flocked out of their hiding-places to listen and scud around their heads.

Then Locksley pleaded for a solo from Rennie,

and she complied, to the delight of old Saunders, who chuckled to himself,—

"Could any bird beat you bonny lassie! Why, her voice is just like a angel's, it is! When I goes to Davy Jones's Locker I hopes that'll be the music I shall hear on the Jasper Sea."

On the fairy skiff darted till the cliffs faded from their sight, and poor blind Jack's spirit rose with the enjoyment of the hour; and he clapped his hands with glee, laughed, sang, and chattered till he almost forgot the terrible darkness which overshadowed his brief young life.

As all pleasure must have an end this was not an exception, and one and all seemed loth to return; but, at last, the grating of the sand beneath them told its tale; their delightful trip was over, and Sir Lyth had sent the pony-carriage for them.

"You will come back with us!" urged Jack, as Locksley was about to raise his straw hat and bid them adieu.

It is needless to say he assented, and Rennie gave Jack just a wee bit of a squeeze of affection for his tact. A throng of curiosity-mongers collected round them to quiz the splendidly appointed little carriage and its inmates, and to speculate if the harness was real silver or plated.

"How exceedingly touching. I might say pathetic!" observed a tall, vinegary-faced personage on the wrong side of forty; "a blind boy's guide; quite theatrical!"

"Isn't it absurd for a girl to go posing about in such a ridiculous fashion, instead of having a man to lead the poor fellow about?" observed a little podgy, sandy-haired girl, jealously. "I believe they are only nobodies who are trying their utmost to thrust themselves into society; besides, pony-carriages can be hired."

"What arrant nonsense you are talking," snapped her companion. "Anyone with a grain of common sense can see that this is no hired affair. The man-servant, the crest on the harness, and the magnificent ponies tell their own tale."

"Oh, I suppose you are going to fall down and worship this new fetish the men are all raving about!" snapped number one.

"I am sure you are free to do so, but I am no admirer of little baby-faced chits, whose fitting place seems to me the school-room."

"What date did you leave yours?" satirically put in a merry girl, who had joined them. "The time of the flood, I should imagine!"

"From your impudent manners I doubt if you ever had the advantage of one!" retorted the vinegary one, spitefully.

The merry girl laughed maliciously, and betook herself off, feeling she had had the best of it, while the others swooped down on the beach to ridicule and listen among themselves at the bathers.

When the trio arrived home, they found Sir Capal Lyth *non est*, he having gone on a fishing expedition with an old friend; so they lunched together, and even dispensed with the old butler.

The glasses sparkled and jingled musically, as the three drank to each other, and, somehow, the sweet little hostess's hands would get mixed up confusedly with Jack's and Locksley's, and the last-named personage persisted in retaining it just to note the contrast of his sun-tanned one with the tiny snowdrop it looked when lying in his.

Of course all this was Greek to poor sightless Jack, who acted as wisely as the most diplomatic mother could desire were she determined to bring things to a successful issue.

After luncheon Jack pleaded for music, seconded by Locksley, and of course the majority carried the day. Rennie sang song after song, and the birds caught up the melodies and chimed in their loudest, and Locksley became entranced as he bent over the sunny head to turn over her music.

There was only one blur in Locksley's bliss which persisted in obtruding itself into his mind—the thought that he was a poor man, while Rennie Allison was the idolized grandchild of a wealthy baronet.

"If I was only rich or she was poor," he kept mentally saying, "I could then have hope!"

And she sang on, her sweet notes vibrating through the room out to the bees and the flowers and the birds. Then she warbled "Twickenham Ferry," a favourite of Jack's, and he began pondering how delicious it must have been to be that stalwart young ferryman, with the dainty maid in his boat; and devoutly wished he could be that fortunate individual, and Rennie the maiden, when a querulous voice said peevishly,—

"What a terrible noise you are making! It is ear-splitting, and even disturbed my poor parrot. Please shut up that horrid piano; you know I hate music!"

Poor Rennie sprang up in affright, and closed it with a bang. She did not relish being chided before Locksley, who looked on with amazement at the tall, gaunt figure, with its hair dressed in a fantastic, bygone fashion.

Her face was wrinkled, her faded blue eyes shifled and gleamed by turns, as if half afraid of the result of her own snappish conduct.

"You haven't introduced me!" she said to Rennie, sharply.

"I beg your pardon, aunt. This is Mr. Locksley Tringham," she hastened to reply. "This is my aunt, Ellen Lyth, Mr. Tringham."

He bowed, and Miss Lyth peered into his face with a vacant stare over her fan, and said with a smirk,—

"Locksley Tringham! Eh, well, and a very nice name, and a very nice young man! You may visit me in my boudoir; I will always be at home to you after twelve! You will be a great favourite with my parrot; you have nice eyes, they are dark ones; he had gray ones, they deceive! Yes, I'll trust you!"

Poor Locksley looked appealingly at Rennie to hasten to his rescue, for the proposed visit alarmed him, lest she should wish to carry out the project then and there.

To his dismay she observed,—

"You may come now if you like."

"Mr. Tringham is just leaving, aunt; he will have to defer the visit to another day," interposed Rennie, seeing his plight.

"You always thwart me in my wishes; you are like your mother," she retorted, spitefully, gathering up her skirts aggressively and stalking from the room with the air of an injured queen.

"Have you offended your aunt?" Locksley inquired, curiously.

"Oh, no; it is her way. I am no favourite of hers, and as for poor Jack she simply ignores him."

"I am sure I am not the loser by that," laughed Jack.

"It is her affliction," Rennie interposed, somewhat reproachfully. "She has been weak of intellect many years, long before I can even remember. This is one of her bad days; but you seem to have taken her fancy, Locksley. You are one of the fortunate ones."

"That remains to be proved," he laughed, ruefully.

"I have heard some rambling story from old nurse Winter that she loved our father, and that the day he married our mother she became what you see her; even Jack's infirmity receives no pity from her. I verily believe she hates us both cordially."

"So long as she doesn't give you too much of her society, why, it need not ruffle your serenity; but a very little of her would go a long way with me," he replied, with a shrug, for somehow the untimely visit had interrupted their harmony strangely. She had certainly plumped down with the proverbial wet blanket, much to Locksley's mortification.

Rennie, seeing the state of things, led her brother out on the lawn to his favourite seat, and then strolled through the cool shrubbery, where the flutter of her white dress caught the attention of Tringham, who, of course, hastened after her.

"I thought you were comfortably ensconced beside Jack," she observed with a suspicion of archness, which lent such a bewitching expression

to her face that he longed to give those saucy ruby lips a kiss. "I left you a charming book of Kingsley's. Return, sir, to your allegiance!"

"Jack is doing, he says it is the sea-air; and—shall I confess?—I blessed Morphew, since it released me from my duty, to come and assist you."

"What is, pray?" she asked, mischievously.

"Catching butterflies, bees, or any other diverting amusement!" he retorted, audaciously.

"I can find you something far more humane and useful, sir! Go and get that basket and scissors from the tool-house, and help me trim the roses."

Off he ran like a lamplighter to obey, while she smiled at his alacrity, and wondered what life would be like without this merry, devoted, frank fellow, whom she had set up as her heart's idol.

"What an enchanting day this is!" he remarked, as they busied themselves over their task. "How on earth shall I ever return to my dusty old chambers and pore over those endless books? Ugh! It appals me to even think of it."

"Don't think of it," she said, softly. "It is bad enough to suffer our life when they arrive without anticipating them."

"Sweet philosopher," he said, tenderly. "It is you, and only you, who force these unpleasant thoughts into my head. When I am near you all is bright and glowing; when I am away from you the world becomes dark and gray."

"Then I must have a very bad influence on you, sir, and the sooner I banish you to your vocation in that delightful old Temple which you call dusty—"

"I crave your mercy there," he laughed. "I meant my own particular den. It would be treason to speak lightly of such a venerable old pile, the nursery-grounds of our St. Leonards, Cairns, and Broughams. But putting all jokes aside, it is a hard battle to fight when you are poor and unknown, all up-hill work. If I know one briefless barrister I know a thousand, gnawing their heartstrings with disappointed hopes."

"Poor fellows! How very pitiable!" she murmured, while tears sprang to her eyes at the picture. "How dreadful it must be to be poor, to feel you have talents and energy lying latent and neglected for the want of opportunity or a friend with influence to assist you!"

"That is what galls and crushes a high spirit, casts it back upon itself, till, in utter despair, it forces back the aspirations, defies them as mocking will-o'-the-wisps, to become an ordinary individual, below mediocrity."

"You must have suffered," she returned, sympathizingly, "or you could never speak so realistically; so did my dear papa. He was poor, and a barrister when mamma married him. He succumbed after three years bitter struggle against fate, and then died broken-hearted."

"But surely Sir Capel helped him!"

She shook her head, and answered in a subdued whisper, as if she was afraid the trees and flowers should hear her,—

"They tell me grandpa never forgave him for jilting auntie; and refused even to see my poor mother till she was dying—yes, dying of grief for the loss of papa."

The long-restrained tears now fell in pearly drops at the recital of the past, whose link was kept green by the garrulous old nurse, who loved the lovely Kate Lyth, whom she had first served as maid and then as nurse to her orphan children, before and after her untimely death.

"He was harsh, unrelenting," he said, gravely.

"That is what the world would say," she said, quickly; "but see how poor auntie's life was shattered! Think of her anguish, of its intensity, when it deprived her of reason! Surely poor grandpa had sore provocation."

"Was not your mother as dear to him?" he interposed, warmly.

"Yes, oh, yes! He has proved his love and forgiveness to her by his devoted affection to us,"

she said, loyally; "and has even made a handsome provision for our future."

"I wish you were not so rich," he interrupted, anxiously, "for I feel assured it will bar our continued happy meeting."

"Why should it?" she asked simply.

"Because I love you," he whispered, passionately. "Love you so dearly, so wholly, that to contemplate an existence without you is a thousand times worse than the thought of death; and I know Sir Capel would never consent to give you to a poor, miserable, briefless barrister."

A shade came over her face, for his words sank deep in her heart. She felt their truth, and her tongue refused the comfort she yearned to afford him. She dared not bid him hope after the experience of her ill-fated mother.

"You are silent, Rennie!" he said, brokenly. "You know how hopeless, how miserable will be my fate! If I were brave enough to tempt it I decree—if I were rich—would you give me this little hand!"

She drooped her golden head; the sun was shedding a glorious halo around, and murmured,—

"Riches to me seem dross, but your love would be more precious than the whole world."

"Then you do love me?" he answered, rapturously.

"Say, do not misconstrue me, Locksley. I love you, yes; but I would never do what my dear mother did—hamper your untied life; disobedience never could or would prosper."

"Then you would not make a sacrifice for one you love?" he asked, impulsively. "You would not marry me without Sir Capel's consent?"

"Certainly not," this firmly. "It would be the act of an ingrate. No happiness could succeed anything so base."

"And yet you admit you love me!" he argued moodily.

"But I love honour best," she replied childishly.

"You have conquered!" he exclaimed, seeing that sweet young face looking so sad and wistful; and, for a mad, swift moment, he caught her to his throbbing breast and held her firmly, and gazed in those forget-me-not eyes with a wild, delirious burst of overwhelming passion whose floodgates were freed after a terrific storm, and their breaths mingled as he bent over her, while her pulses seemed to dance with the ecstasy of the delicious moment—that divine minute when two hearts beat with one accord, and two souls become absorbed—lost, as it were, in each other's identity.

"Let me go!" she sighed, all her majestically reserve rushing back upon her dazed senses; and he, abashed at his temerity, released her, pleading humbly to be pardoned for the impulse, which, loving her as he did, was impossible to resist, as it was for that young sapling of a sunflower that nodded its pale yellow head over them to hide its face from the warm, loving sun.

Suddenly she sprang like a young antelope out of the shrubbery in affright, crying,—

"Here is grandpa coming! I must go," and he saw her join Sir Capel, who was riding through the gates on one of his splendid hunters.

"I had better get out by the paddock," he said to himself, guiltily, for the enormity of his behaviour in winning the heart of the wealthy Baronet's granddaughter rushed upon him at that instant when he watched Rennie fly like a frightened bird from his arms.

She tripped beside him up to the house and patted the glossy neck of Baron, who neighed his appreciation, and poked his cold nose carelessly into her hands; and Jack, hearing the bustle of his return, woke up and groped his way to them to be eagerly questioned as to his morning's exploit, which he, in return, raved about as being the jolliest one he had spent since his stay in Hastings.

"So you had young Tringham with you as well as Saunders?" the Baronet remarked. "A very nice arrangement, for he is a good seaman, I hear, and a capital fellow. Where is he, little sly-bone?" this to Rennie, as he pinched her cheek.

"He has gone," she replied, her eyelids drooping shyly.

"Gone, has he?" he repeated. "He should have stayed to dine with us."

"He did lunch with us," she ventured to confess. "Didn't he, Jack?"

"Yes; he is one of good fun, too, grandpa, and the kindest and nicest of fellows. I wish I could see him! I know I should admire him even more."

How her heart kindled at Jack's praise of her hero, for that he was one she never doubted, notwithstanding the memory of that moment of supreme passionate excitement when he tempted her to cast all claims aside to link her lot with his.

"Oh! you dear old Jack, you are a real darling!" she exclaimed, exuberantly, when they were alone, and hugging him round the neck vigorously. "Shall I describe what he is like?"

"Who's like?" he asked, a droll expression flitting over his face, as a flash of the truth burst upon him.

"Why, who could I mean but our friend Lo—I mean Mr. Tringham. You just now told grandpa you were sure you would admire him if you could see him. Please Heaven (this reverently) the day may not be distant when your wish may be gratified; but suppose, in the meanwhile, I describe him, give you a word-painting of him as it were?"

"Nothing I should like better," he replied, encouragingly.

"Well, then, to commence; he is a good bit taller than you—"

"That I know," he laughed, "for I tried his height a long time ago."

"Please don't interrupt, sir," she pouted, "but permit me to go on, unless you can supply the particulars better than the artist. Well, I was at his height. As I said before, he is nice and tall, and graceful, and has such soft, brown hands all full of little dimples at the knuckles; and feet—well, they are really *petite*."

"I thought it was to be a portrait, not a statue!" he laughed, mischievously.

"I'm half in mind to go upstairs to my smugger and have a fit of the sniffs, you nasty, plaguety fellow."

"You'll forgive me teasing you just a wee bit, Sir," he pleaded, half comically, half earnestly. "Since you ask me to, I suppose I must. Well, I had got to his feet. Now I'll jump up to his face, which is full of kindness, and his eyes are splendid, tender, large and—"

"And—"

"True!" she added, glibly; "his mouth firm, but! oh, so sweet and tender!—with a soft brown moustache that matches his head, which is just like that head in the library, of Apollo."

"By Jove, he must indeed be handsome, Sir. It is a blessing he isn't hiding near us to hear your description, he would think you had fallen in love with him."

"Nonsense, sir," she rejoined, impetuously. "What do you know about such silly things?"

"Only what my two foolish ears can catch, for my eyes are out of it, at any rate."

Another hug was the result of this speech. And thus they chattered till the first dinner-bell broke the spell, and Jack's man arrived on the scene to lead him off to dress for dinner.

As Locksley Tringham sauntered to his hotel, he was certainly in a very miserable humour, for it seemed his day-dream would prove very short, though entrancingly sweet.

"If I were rash enough to confess my love for Rennie to Sir Lyth, after his relentless conduct to his daughter, who married a poor devil like myself, I should very probably be shown out by the obliging butler," he ruminated, "and get my sweet sunbeam into no end of trouble. That is a nice prospect certainly for a man who has met his fate, and loves to distraction!"

He tilted his hat over his eyes to shut out the very sun; it seemed to mock his misery by its garishness. Many pretty maids and matrons passed the tall, lithe, handsome fellow, who never deigned even to give them a cursory glance of recognition, try as they might to evoke one of those radiant smiles they each and all coveted so

much—for he was a great favourite among the fair sex.

"It would be better to leave this and return to my books," he thought, sadly. "There is not the faintest chance of ever wringing a consent out of Sir Capel to our union; it is maddening to even think of it!"

And although the afternoon was glorious, and the air laden with the scent from the new-mown hay that came in puffs across the sunny slopes, and his feet were sinking in a sea of flowering grasses, he passed by nature's sweets and glories completely oblivious of them, with but one distracting thought rising in his mind—the necessity of leaving this little sea-fairy, the only woman who had ever stirred the depths of his deep, lovable nature.

"She will learn to forget me in time!" he sighed. "Yes, it's only a battle with self!"

Looking up vacantly he saw exotics being placed in the entrance to the assembly rooms—tall spiral aloe, and graceful palms—in readiness for the grand ball; and, strange to relate, all his resolutions to quit Hastings were cast aside—for that day at least.

"It would be churlish, ungentlemanly even, to slink off now," he argued with his flexible conscience, as he hastened his pace and gained his hotel.

CHAPTER II.

FAIRY forms were floating around the rose-garlanded ball-room, while the cool, still sea, lying clear and calm beneath the starred canopy of the greyish-blue heavens, could be seen from the open windows.

A silvery crescent-moon bathed the night-flowers, and their fragrance stole in to mingle with the baskets and banks of their curled companions, to ravish the hearts and senses of the human flowers.

It was not an ordinary dance, but a grand *fête*, the proceeds of which were to be devoted to a hospital; so that only the *crème de la crème* were the order of the night, and accounted for the arrangements being conducted on such a complete and superb scale.

Lady Louisa Mortimer, a most charming woman, took charge of Rennie, who eclipsed every girl in the room by her beauty.

"If I could only win her!" said the only son of Lady Mortimer, "I'd be the happiest fellow under the sun!"

And Sir Tracy Mortimer was worthy even the queen of the ball, being one of the finest Saxon types of manly beauty—broad-shouldered, deep-chested, with crisp flaxen hair, and dark blue earnest eyes—a pet with all the girls wherever he went. In fact, the most of his time was spent, without any desire of his own, among fair devotees.

They haunted and sought him, they laid little traps to meet him to make engagements with them, to get him to their side. In the morning lounge, on the sands, on the promenade, the ride, the drive, or the reunions of the night, there they were by his side.

And now they all flocked around him like so many beautiful bees around a honey-jar, each looking at him her sweetest to catch him for a dance, while he stood gazing longingly at the fairy seated beside his mother, perplexing his brain as to how many dances he could coax her to grant him.

Plucking up courage he said,—

"The 'Salter's Waltz' is just about to strike up. Will you favour me?"

She glanced up with those large, wondering eyes of hers without a vestige of shyness and replied,—

"Yes, for it is my favourite. I play it to Jack, and he joins in with the voice part."

"You will think me presumptuous, but I am putting down two more," he said half nervously, half jocularly.

"I must say nay," she interposed, calmly.

"Why?" he protested, a shade of deep disappointment crossing his face.

"Because I prefer to sit and look at the dancers without fatigue."

"I must, of course, yield to your wishes," he replied, returning the perfumed programme into her pretty white-gloved hand with a sigh.

As Locksley entered the room his eyes were dazzled for a moment, and then they wandered in search of his heart's idol, and he saw her whirling round in the many waltzes in the arms of Sir Tracy Mortimer, his eyes bent upon her full of rapturous fire, and his voice lowered to whispered tones of softness.

A pang, almost as of death, smote him, and he shivered with jealous agony; he never knew the extent of his passion till that supreme moment.

When the waltz was over, Rennie, who had caught sight of his pale face as she flitted so close to him that her skirts brushed him, made her way to him.

"You could not wait for me," he said, reproachfully.

"Certainly not, sir; you should not tarry," she retorted, merrily, anxious to chase away that look of pain in his face by rallying him.

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had tarried till it was too late," he remarked, with a tinge of rancour that vexed her, and determined her to punish him for his evident jealousy.

"Pray excuse me, Mr. Tringham. I see an old friend; I must speak to him," she observed, hastily; and away she floated towards a small old gentleman with an eyeglass propped artistically in his eye.

Every pulse in Locksley's body throbbled with pain, every fibre of his heart was sick, for he deemed her fickle, cruel—nay, heartless—to treat him with such cutting indifference, after that scene in the garden, too, when her head had lain on his breast, and she had murmured out that she loved him.

Completely reckless, and smarting with fierce resentment, he fell a willing captive to the wiles of a handsome girl, whose eyes had entreated him to dance with her, if ever eyes spoke a language.

When Rennie saw the couple scud past her she sat down beside her chaperon aghast, and her short upper lip quivered and then curled with anger.

After the dance was over she watched the handsome girl go towards the refreshment buffet with Locksley; and yes, horror of horrors, she was blushing and he was smiling, and whispering into the tiny waxen ear, in which gleamed a lustrous sapphire.

She bit her lip, and the tears nearly sprang into her eyes.

"He is a flirt," she murmured, "an arrant good-for-nothing flirt, and I will never—no never—speak to him again!"

"Why do you not dance, my love?" Lady Mortimer asked. "There's poor Tracy dying to have another."

"I prefer looking on; the night is warm, and I get so insufferably hot."

"Which makes you look prettier than ever," put in her ladyship. "I like to see the roses in preference to the lilies; they suit you better."

After a bit she escaped to the terrace to breathe the fresh, warm night air. She slid down on a seat in the shade of an azalea tree. The sound of laughter and merriment came from the room, the rich streams from the music floated through the glass doors; the flowers sent forth their countless odours, and rose at her feet—all charming things in themselves, but they grated inharmoniously on poor Rennie's heart, for she was now in the throes of real miserable jealousy.

All pleasure—the pleasure which she had been anticipating with such girlish delight—had fled, and she felt an irresistible impulse to have a good cry; so, like a foolish little thing she pressed her throbbing temples on the rails and commenced to weep silently, when someone touched her on the shoulder, and giving a little shiver she looked up to see Sir Tracy Mortimer, for her intense disappointment and shame—shame to feel that he had been watching her, and seen her grief.

"Miss Allison, dear Miss Allison!" he said, tenderly, bending over her with deep concern; "what has made you unhappy; can I offer you

any comfort! Has anyone dared to annoy or offend you?"

"No; a thousand times no!" she rejoined, almost brusquely, dashing away the sparkling tears that were plashing like pearls on her bouquet. "I have only a fit of the blues, that is all."

"Then permit me to drive those nasty blues away."

"I don't want them driven away," this defiantly. "I like to be sad sometimes; showers are as necessary as the sunshine."

"But not at a ball," he protested. "I feel sure somebody has vexed you. I only wish I knew who it was."

"Suppose a lady had been the culprit, Sir Tracy?" looking up with the old flash of good-humour in her face, for hers was too good a nature to be long cross with anyone.

"Well, that would, of course, be rather awkward," he stammered. "I could not very well punch a lady's head, though I might do it mentally if I knew her; but, joking apart" (this earnestly, as he caught her hands and gazed down into her face, his eyes ablaze with a rash, wild project), "Miss Allison, Rennie, my love! let me be your comforter now and for ever!"

His words leaped out in a torrent before she could prevent their utterance.

"Sir Tracy! indeed—"

"I forbid you to crush out my hopes until you have loved me!" he interposed, excitedly. "I have loved you. Oh! since when? Is it possible to even remember! From the moment I, a little unhappy boy, was banished from the desert table for disobedience, and you, like the ministering little spirit you were, followed me, and placed your little hand in mine, and said, 'Dear Tracy, I will come and play with you, and then plead with your mamma to forgive you.'"

"And you haven't forgotten that?" she said, gravely.

"Forgot it? No; and never shall. Oh, Rennie, I can never forget you while my heart continues to beat!"

"I am so sorry!" she sighed, plaintively. "I am not a flirt whose pastime is winning hearts to break them. I had no idea you cared for me like this!"

"Are you going to crush all my hopes, then?" he asked, brokenly. "Surely you can leave me a shred to cling to, if—if no other has won your affections! I don't want an answer now. I will be content to wait!"

"Please forbear!" she said, rising and facing him calmly, soothingly. "Every word you say stabs me, for I can never grant you what you ask; it is impossible!"

"Then you love someone?" he ejaculated, huskily. "It is impossible that you could reject one who loves you so dearly if it were not so!"

"Pray question me no more!" she pleaded. "For the sake of the time when you admit I was your friend and comforter, let me be both now. If I cannot be all you wish, I can still be that if you will permit me."

"I may in time," he said, feeling, in his cruel disappointment, as if he should choke; "but not now," and looking up she found he had gone.

"Was ever girl so wretched as I?" he moaned. "I seem doomed to make everybody miserable. I wish Jack and I could live in a wood all by ourselves; I am sure we should be happy, and then no one could make me vexed and I couldn't vex them. I had better go and find Lady Mortimer."

Then the horrid thought crossed her that she was not a very presentable figure with a tear-stained face.

"If I could only catch a glimpse of a glass," she said to herself. "I know I must look a regular little fright!"

Then a vision of stately loveliness in pale blue darted across her active brain, and she pictured to herself Lockley whispering more sweet little subtle nothings in that jewelled ear, and in revenge she crushed some of the waxen blossoms out of her bouquet and—shall we admit it!—stamped her dainty foot on them viciously.

"Why, Rennie, you have given me a terrible fright. I have hunted everywhere for you!"

It was Lockley's voice, and for the moment she would have given the world to have flown out of his presence—out of his reach—but she could not stir, for the heart will be true to itself in spite of will; so instead of flight she sat on and held her pretty, diamond-crowned head over her crushed flowers guiltily—humbly.

He gently wound his arms round her, and little silly Rennie burst into tears.

"My darling, my love, why have you run away from me to-night?" he whispered. "Why suffer a cloud to come between us? I have borne martyrdom!"

"Why did you dance with that fright of a blue girl, and make her sinner and blush so?"

"I might retaliate why did you give the first dance to Sir Tracy? But I won't, because it would mar the joy of this happy moment when I hold you in my arms and see the sweet love-light dancing in your eyes. Oh, my love, I am well repaid for my wretched jealous fears now. I was nearly crazed when I couldn't find you!"

"Then you did not dance again with her?" she asked.

"Why, my darling, my pet aversion is big women. They seem to overwhelm me. By Jove! I don't fancy I could screw up my courage to propose to one; she would have to propose to me and marry me, too. I shouldn't have a voice in the matter. By-the-by, I met Sir Tracy looking as white as a sheet. I stopped to question him about you, and he scowled and dashed past me."

"Did he?" she murmured, innocently. "Perhaps he was thirsty, and wanted some claret cup."

"Thirsty! Botheration take the fellow, he might have been civil!" he laughed. "But who cares, fairy, for indeed you are one in reality to-night" (holding her at arm's length to view her perfectly), "now that we are reconciled. Listen, sweet one, while I whisper ever so softly, that even the trees and the flowers may not hear our delicious secret, that, much as I believed I loved you, I never knew its power till to-night. You shall be my guiding star through life; for your sweet sake I will work night and day to win a name worthy to lay at your feet; armed with that I will come boldly to Sir Capel and ask him to give you to me. To-morrow I start for town to work earnestly with one of the grandest prizes for my reward that ever spurred a man to do or dare!"

"And may Heaven prosper you!" she said, reverently.

The twinkling stars shone down upon them, and the moon shed a soft radiance on her fair face, and he bent his to hers in the hushed night and responded fervently.

"Amen," and sealed the petition with a kiss, not of passion, but of grave, earnest solemnity.

It was a radiant face that met Lady Mortimer, one so changed that she positively marvelled at its wondrous transformation; her rippling laughter floated here, there, and everywhere, and happy smiles reigned in place of tears, while her eyes sparkled with a soft, liquid fire.

"What a little fast creature that girl is!" thought the dame in blue, spitefully, as she watched Lockley and Rennie chattering and laughing together like magpies over their loss. "It's a pity her chaperon doesn't put a stop to her boydenish behaviour!"

Too indignant to stop to see more of their happiness she betook herself off in a rage to show him he was not the only handsome man in the room, fondly cherishing the belief that she would bring him back to her feet when he saw her smiling and luring in her toils another victim.

For she thoroughly imagined herself to be irresistible, and far surpassing Rennie in her *petite* loveliness.

Some big women have that expanse of good opinion of themselves which matches their stature, forgetting the choicest gems, pictures, and works of art are generally the smallest in size.

Lady Mortimer could not help noticing her son's air of melancholy, and put it down to a feeling of jealousy at the evident pleasure

Lockley and his partner evinced in each other's society.

"Quite a little coquette," thought her ladyship, not too pleased at her laughing, frolicsome conduct. "This must be curbed before any mischief occurs. Tracy, do kindly go and tell Miss Allison I want her," she said, with resolution.

"I would rather not," he answered, gloomily. "I never care to act the death's head at the feast."

"What do you mean, dear?" she asked, with concern. "Have you quarrelled with Miss Allison?"

"Quarrelled, mother? Certainly not!" he protested, petulantly. "I only brought matters to a crisis, and, but pique take it, the wound rankles; it is fresh."

"I can supply the rest," she said, pityingly. "she refused you. Well, perhaps it's for the best, dear son, though I would rather it had been otherwise."

"If you will excuse me, mother, I would like to leave this garish place; it mocks me in the mood I am in."

Taking his hand she pressed it tenderly by way of assent. She deeply sympathized with him in the hour of his trial, for he was very dear to her—her only son, and she was a widow.

"Who is that gentleman you were so friendly to, dear?" Lady Mortimer asked, later on, when Rennie had returned to the shelter of her wing. There was a sparkle of reproach in her eyes as she looked into the animated face searchingly.

"An old friend of grandpa's and Jack's," she answered, evasively, her face crimsoning guiltily under the scrutiny.

"He was dancing the first part of the evening with Miss Edlice, that fair girl in blue. I thought he was engaged to her for some time, they appeared on such lover-like terms," she said, with a depth of significance in her gentle voice to test her listener.

"You are perfectly mistaken," she hastened to reply, innocently; "he doesn't care a straw for her."

"How do you know that? Men are sometimes gay deceivers, my child!"

"He is not; oh, no! I would trust him with my life. He is the soul of truth and honour. Jack says so, and I endorse what Jack thinks."

"There is no hope for my poor boy," sighed her ladyship, somewhat bitterly, for she had hoped it would turn out but a girlish flirtation. "I can only hope he will prove worthy of her."

There was no son to arrange her wraps, to attend to those small, but important, details so necessary by its custom; and she felt almost resentful when Lockley, all smiles, came up and offered his services to her first, and then devoted himself to the delightful task of helping to enshroud the glittering little figure of Rennie in her dainty white satin cloak, and conducted them to their carriage.

Lady Mortimer felt lipped and mortified at his seeming triumph over her absent son, and her thanks froze on her lips in return for his courtesy.

During their short journey they both preserved a kind of tacit alliance. Rennie's thoughts were engrossed with her love-dream, while her companion pondered over the vexations of life, of the light of hope Sir Tracy had when they set out for the ball, and how confident she had been to return with her as his bride-elect, never dreaming for one moment that the delirium of love had ever touched her innocent heart.

"It is too bad," she let escape, pettishly, in her cruel disappointment.

"What is too bad, dear Lady Mortimer?" Rennie asked, simply.

"That pleasure is so brief and fleeting," was the evasive answer, and they both relapsed into silence once more.

CHAPTER III.

"Going away?" Jack gasped, in tones of dismay, the morning following the ball, when Lockley called to bid them all good-bye. "I thought you were going to stop as long as us!"

"I might have had that intention, dear boy, but second thoughts are best as a rule."

"I shall miss you very much, so will my sister. I had hoped you would have seen me through this next operation."

"If I could do you any good, Jack, rest assured I should stay, whatever my inclinations were, but I could be of no use to you under the circumstances, as perfect quiet will have to be maintained after it is over."

"Do you think there is any hope of their curing me?" he asked, piteously.

"I pray earnestly their efforts may succeed this time!" he replied, gently. "There is no doubt yours is a very trying case, and rather difficult to combat with; these blights always are so, I hear. But keep up courage, dear boy; everything is possible with human skill and Heaven's grace."

"I wish I could feel hopeful. Do you know there are times when I wish I was dead!" murmured Jack, a sob catching his throat. "This eternal darkness seems to be my doom, to cling to me from year to year! It would have been better to have been born blind, for what I had never enjoyed I could never have missed. I am strong and hearty, longing to run like the wind, and yet chained down like a useless log! Oh! Locksley, it is too hard to bear without rebelling against such a cruel fate!" and great scalding tears fell from those sightless eyes, whose anguish would have made an angel weep.

Two soft arms stole round his neck, and a warm, peachy cheek nestled caressingly against his stained face.

Rennie had heard their conversation unperceived.

"Jack! dear old Jack! am I nothing to you that you should talk so hopelessly! I love you, and will never leave you!—My eyes, and hands, and feet are all yours now! Have you forgotten how you used to carry me across the brooks and ditches, and swing me for hours down by the old pear-tree when I was a weak morsel, and you were so strong! You never deserted me then to play with other boys fit and able to amuse you, but devoted yourself to your silly little sis, and I am going to be what you were to me then!"

The recollection of their merry, frolicsome, childish days chased away all gloomy thoughts from Jack, and they were soon laughing and chatting away as happy as three crickets.

It is over thus with youthful natures; smiles and tears seem to mingle—to, in fact, leave their existence.

"Good-bye, darling! my heart's idol!" Locksley was saying, as they lingered for one brief moment beneath a friendly hedge. "When I have made a position fit to bring before Sir Capel, I will ask the boon of this little hand. I should only jeopardise my cause if I was rash enough to declare my love now!"

"Yes! oh, yes!" she said, wistfully. "It would be useless. We must wait, dear; time is ours. Besides, much as I love you, I can never leave Jack while he is blind."

"What if he should never be cured?" he asked, hoarsely, a terrible fear rushing madly through his brain.

"I dare not think of anything so terrible!" she replied. "But, if Heaven so willed it, I should never leave Jack!"

As he made his way to the station, those words would persist in ringing in his ears,—

"I should never leave Jack!"

They haunted him, and that night he commenced to send up long, earnest petitions to Heaven to restore sight to Rennie's brother.

The operation was performed, but, no result followed of any consequence, to the surprise and disappointment of the oculists; and, finding no improvement, Jack began to tire of Hastings, as all invalids do whose hopes have been dashed. The weather, too, helped to drive them away, for it seemed to take an ill-natured fit by deluging the roads and streets with rain and wind; wretched, gusty, tumultuous storms that blew you nearly off your feet, and turned the sandy paths into slush.

Poor Rennie moped and fretted at the loss of her lover and her enforced confinement to the

house; so the end of it was all the household packed up, and prepared to return to their old home in Hampshire.

As if to mock them, the sun shone out gloriously as they took their seats in the express, and the sea never looked more alluring as it sparkled and rippled tantalizingly in the south-easterly breeze.

"I declare we haven't had such a day for a week!" grumbled Rennie. "And I do verily believe it is going to be splendid now we are leaving it! Splendid old sea!" and Sir Capel laughed at the tiny pucker that gathered on his pet's brow.

But she soon regained her good-humour, especially when she espied the old family chariot waiting for them in the station-yard.

"Dear old Glenhorth!" she cried, gleefully, "there is no place half so nice after all!" and her pretty eyes drank in the scene with delight.

The distant woodlands were flooded by a thin, purple haze; leagues of golden gorse shimmered in the setting sun's rays, a scent of wild thyme lingered in the air.

Rennie smiled a recognition to an old shepherd who stood bareheaded to see the squire's carriage and its occupants.

It was a glorious afternoon, or, rather, early evening, and never had Glenhorth looked so fair.

The house itself was an old-fashioned, red-brick mansion, mantled over with hoary old ivy, which tried, and not in vain, to cover every vestige of the glaring red bricks. It stood aloft on a rise, and was backed by sheets of green woodland; a broad terrace ran round the front, and sloped down to a velvety lawn, beyond which ran the river, where, beneath the sedges and tangled weed, bonny fine trout could be seen frolicking in peaceful content.

Hand-in-hand, Rennie and Jack visited all their favourite spots—the stable, the dogs, the venerable pear-tree where the old swing used to hang, but which decay had set its devastating sceptre upon now; and its poor, tottering limbs looked grey and gaunt, a piteous contrast to a jaunty young Maria Louisa, that held up its stately head, all crowned with golden fruit, impudently, almost aggressively, as much as to say,—"You've had your day, old man; please make a little more room for a younger favourite."

The dogs yelped and barked and yapped their delight, and sprang on Rennie, to the detriment of her pretty gown, while Jack caroused and patted their curly heads or sleek ones, and whistled to them; while they, sagacious creatures, whined and laid their great paws in his hands as if they knew it was not right to be bolsterous with him in his sore affliction.

"Those look well, sir,—I mean mine," said a grey-headed groom, who felt he would like to cut his tongue out for being such a fool as to refer to the young master, for he could see Jack's lips quiver with pain.

"They seem bonnier than ever, Gough," Rennie said, winningly. "The beauties! They are crazed with delight to see us back; and you have been very, very good to them, I can see."

"I wish Locksley could only see our home," she said, enthusiastically; "he would be enchanted with it; wouldn't he, Jack!"

He of course acquiesced, as he always did in her opinions; and it was a happy group who sat down to the dinner-table that evening. Even Aunt Eleanor seemed to be infected with the feeling, and alighted and twittered about fussily, even going so far as to sit in the drawing-room while Rennie sang "Home, sweet home," in her sweet, pathetic voice.

"I used to sing that once," the poor lady said, confidentially to Jack. "They used to call me a nightingale when I was young," and she essayed to join Rennie in a shrill cracked voice, beating time with those restless fingers that never would be still.

Sir Capel kindly asked her to desist, and like a child she obeyed, but betook herself off in a tantrum to her room.

When the letters were laid before the Baronet the next morning at breakfast, he gave a start of surprise, and ejaculated,—

"Why, children, your uncle is on his way

back from Australia. It seems he is tired of roaming."

"Is he going to remain, grandpa?" Rennie asked.

"I hope so, for it is time he attended to the estate, as he, by the order of nature, must soon be master of it."

Strange to say, the news brought no smiles of pleasure into Jack's or Rennie's faces, it was a feeling of dread that took its place, for well they knew their Uncle William bore them no good feeling, he having refused to forgive his unhappy sister Kate for her ill-starred union, and the dire consequences it caused to his favourite sister Eleanor.

William Lyth was a widower, with one daughter, who had been sent to Paris for her education which now was completed, and it was principally for her sake that her father had made up his mind to quit Australia, and take up his life once more in his ancestral hall, to install his daughter in it as mistress.

Another letter conveyed the intelligence that Lady Mortimer and her son had determined to winter in Rome.

"Some coming, some going," the Baronet said, half aloud, and Rennie's breakfast seemed as if it would choke her, for well she knew who was the cause of the departure of the Mortimers.

"Tell dear Rennie we should have liked to have run down to say good-bye," he read out; "only Tracy is anything but well, and the doctor says he wants immediate change, so we must fain obey."

"A rather sudden attack of illness," the Baronet observed. "Why, he was well enough the other day." He did not notice the swift paleness, or the drooping of those truthful eyes, as Rennie stammered out deprecatingly,—

"Illness sometimes comes upon us quickly, grandpa; look at poor Jack, how his eyes were all right in the morning and by the evening he could not see."

"Yes, dear; but that was different. But here is a letter for you, Jack; shall I read it, or would you prefer Rennie?"

"You, grandpa, please," he answered, eagerly.

"The Temple."

"DEAR JACK" (Oh! how her heart throbbed at the magic word "Temple"),—

"Though absent you are all green in my memory, and many a weary sigh escapes me as I plod over my books, and look out to see a wilderness of chimney-pots, and contrast it with your Arcadia at Hastings; and in place of the clear, sparkling waves have to content myself with grey, murky old Father Thames, and its rotten old tubs they style steamboats. I was awfully grieved to hear no better result followed your operation; but keep up heart. Science is still in its infancy, and I am making inquiries to find someone more skilful than you have hitherto come across. Give my kindest remembrances to Sir Capel and your sister. Tell her I have found out seaweed makes a capital barometer. And now, with my very kindest regards, believe me ever your affectionate friend,

"LOCKSLEY TRINGHAM."

The allusion to the seaweed made the warm blood leap into her face, for well she knew the hint and its meaning.

"A very nice letter," the Baronet remarked. "It is a thousand pities he is only a poor struggling barrister; he seems worthy of something better."

"Could you get him something, grandpa?" she said, impulsively. "Oh! I would love you so dearly if you would!"

"I might procure him a billet in the Treasury if I could get Lord Helmore in the humour. Old Mordan is about to retire, so there is a vacancy, if it could be contrived."

"Oh, grandpa! if you can only bring it about I would be for ever grateful; and as for Mr. Tringham, why, he would never cease to thank you," she exclaimed, bubbling over with delight.

"You seem to take an uncommon interest in this young spark!" he laughed, good-humouredly.

olly. "I hope, little sunbeam, you haven't lost your heart and left him to find it."

Doesn't being repugnant to Rennie, who was as candid and true as the sun that poured into the room, always impulsive, she sprang up and twined her arms round the old gentleman's neck and whispered,—

"Would you be dreadfully angry, dear grandpa, if I said I did like him just a wee bit?"

"Humph—er—well, I cannot quite say," he returned, awkwardly. "You know he is very poor, and that is bad to start with."

"But he is very clever," she urged, coaxingly. "and perhaps you could get him this appointment you just mentioned."

"You little chatterbox, you seem to have taken everything for granted," he returned, smiling at her eager face.

"You cannot go from your word, grandpa; you, whose word is so sacred, that to get it, if ever so softly whispered, is to know your boon is granted."

"Little wheedler, I wish you wouldn't have such a knack of making an old stupid of me!" he said, gravely.

"Then you will try to get him in the Treasury, and you won't be angry with me for liking him a little bit?"

"I will do my best, but mind, there must be no love-making till I see him, and inquire for myself if he is worthy so rich a prize as my little sunbeam."

She promised ever so faithfully, and smothered him with kisses from her dewy lips, and twisted his snowy hair round her rosy fingers into rings, and hugged him till his spotted shirt-front and tie became tumbled and creased beyond recognition.

"Now I shall have to change this," he observed, ruefully, "and I am already late for my appointment with Mr. Denton."

"Are you going shooting?" she asked.

"Yes, my love, I am going to bring you some partridges for dinner."

She glanced up at the grey haze that hung over the earth, shutting out the sun, which in revenge shone out in a huge crimson ball of splendour.

"How dull it has come overhead," Rennie said, a little shudder running through her frame. "It looks like a funeral pall trying to shut out that red globe."

"Fudge! little sentimentalist," he retorted, patting the golden coronet carefully. "It seems to me you are getting quite a dreamer since that rebel of a Tringham stole a large piece of your heart from your old grandfather."

"No man, if he were an Emperor, could do that," she answered, earnestly. "I can never forget what you have been to Jack and me."

"I have tried to redeem my harshness to the dead," a sudden break in his voice, "but the task has been a light one with two such dutiful children as you have been; but there, chatterbox, I must not delay any longer, Denton will fume like a town bull."

"I wish I didn't feel so oppressed," she thought, dimly. "I'm getting a real hypochondriac when the days are cloudy. What a nasty old woman I'll be if I give way to such nonsense!"

Then her thoughts took another turn, and she began to picture Lockley in his lonely rooms among the stacks of chimney-pots, and wondered where he had put that piece of seaweed—if it was on his writing-table or chimney-piece, or in his pocket. Then the sudden coming home of her uncle flashed across her active brain, and she wondered what kind of girl this unknown cousin would be; if fair or dark, tall or short, and if they would like each other, when her musings were arrested by the hurried entrance of the Baronet equipped for his day's sport.

"Good-bye, sunbeam," he said, joyously; "wish me good luck."

"Grandpa, I—I wish you wouldn't go to-day!" she exclaimed, impulsively.

"In the name of goodness, why?" he asked, with surprise. "I thought you were so fond of partridges?"

"It isn't that, it isn't that!" she faltered;

"but it's so cold and cheerless, and I am all of a shiver!"

"You've caught a chill; go to Winter, and ask her to give you some of her herb tea, and keep out of the grounds," he rejoined, cheerily.

The gamekeeper approached, gun on shoulder, to attend his master. Rennie caught hold of him, as if to detain him.

"You are quite feverish, child," he said, anxiously, and, placing her on a chair, rang the bell for Winter to attend her young mistress.

The glass door was opened, and he was about to descend to the lawn, when glancing back over his shoulder to see if the bell had been answered, Rennie sprang after him, and he turned back and kissed the pensive little face that looked into his with a piteous entreaty that made him feel very uncomfortable, and he said tremulously,—

"Heaven bless you, and hold you in its holy keeping."

Then she strained her pretty eyes to watch him as he kept pace with his stalwart companion with a graceful, springy step that many a man a score of years his junior would have envied.

And still she stood there, a white-robed little figure. The soft tendrils of hair ruffled from off her broad white forehead. The Baronet turned when he got to a rise in the ground and saw her there. He shook his hand playfully, while she blew a kiss to him, and then he was lost—gone.

Wearily and sick with some horrible indefinite dread that seemed to overpower her, Rennie entered the drawing-room to meet Winter, who, though old, and not very quick-sighted, yet saw there was something amiss with her young mistress.

"Why, you've been crying, dearie!" she said, anxiously. "Who's been a fretting of yer? Lord help them if I catches any jade or clown bringing tears into those blue eyes!"

"Grandpa says I have taken cold, Winter, and that you're to make me some of your nice herb tea."

"Rabbie, you ain't got no cold, dearie, it's crying you've been. Come, Dovekins," gathering the girl in her ample bosom; "old Winter knows how to comfort yer," and down she plumped on one of the peach-plush couches with her charge, who wept softly, while the dame crooned and whispered words of love and comfort to the overcharged heart.

"Do you believe in presentiments, Winter, dear?" she asked, when she grew calmer. "A kind of awful foreshadowing of some unknown evil, like the sensation you say is a sign of somebody walking over your grave—only worse?"

"Lawks a mercy, no! I don't believe in any such uncanny stuff!"

"I wish I didn't; but I can't help it. You know I had just such a feeling when dear Jack had that dreadful blight, and I entreated him not to go on the river and he would. All I was afraid of was that we should have a spill. I never dreamt anything could happen like it did; but what would we not all give now if he had listened to my pleadings; he might still have his sight."

"That is only known to the Blessed Ruler of all," Winter rejoined solemnly. "We poor creatures are but babies in knowledge. Not as you ain't a very clever Dovekins!" this tenderly, and the Dovekins smiled through her tears, while her eyes were being dabbed in the same old way she remembered so well when she a small child had been especially naughty, and was being comforted by as faithful a friend as ever blessed the heart of mortal.

Very soon they were both deeply immersed in a drawing of herbs, and a pungent odour steamed out of a pipkin, which they both stirred in turns; the old lady deeming it advisable to have her child near her so as to quell any more feverishness or weeping. Of course, putting it all down to hysteria.

So they were both found by Jack, who had been prowling all over the mansion with his stick.

"What a jolly smell!" he exclaimed, dropping on a chair they hastened to place for him. "The

house is as lonely as a tomb! Why are you not playing, sis?"

"I've had a fit of the grumps," laughed Rennie, "and Winter is nursing me up; but we shan't be very long complaining of quiet now that uncle and cousin are coming to live here."

"I only hope he'll be kind to you two," granted Winter. "He never was a very nice master when he was young. Even the dogs used to slink away from the sound of his voice."

"Why?" Rennie asked.

"Because he was over fond of using his cane or whip, anything that came in handy."

"Then he was cruel!" Jack put in.

"Cruel was too soft a word; brutal is more the likes of it, Master Jack. Why, I can recall the day as if it were only yesterday, when he caught your dear mamma's favourite cat, because she had offended him, and threw it down the well and pelted it with stones as it tried to climb some of the jagged bricks!"

"What did you do?" cried Rennie, her eyes blazing, her nostrils dilated, her breath coming in little pants.

"I called him a brute, and he sniggered at me and said he'd serve me the same. If I called him names."

"And did you let the poor cat die?" gasped Rennie, indignantly.

"Not I! I ain't made of such stuff as that. No, I tore like the wind to Sir Chapel, and got assistance, and gave him a lecture he didn't forget; but he owed me a grudge from that moment, but I didn't care a brass farthing for his frown and bluster."

"I shall hate him!" ejaculated Jack earnestly.

"You mustn't take to do that, Master Jack. Maybe he's grown wiser now he's older," chided Winter, regretting she had used her tongue so freely.

"I couldn't like him if he was as old as Methusalem!" cried Rennie. "What is age to do with it? A wicked old man or woman who ceases to sin because of old age is a mean, pitiable object, whose weakness alone deters them from further iniquity."

"Lawks, Dovekins, you talks like a parson! If your mamma could only see and hear you now she'd go crazy with pride and joy."

"Give us 'Home, Sweet Home'!" she, for it seems to me it won't long be that to you and me," pleaded Jack, a short time after the confab in Nurse Winter's snug room.

They had "Home, Sweet Home," and no end of other old favourites; then they sat down by a newly-made fire ordered by the thoughtful little *châtelaine*, thinking it would please grandpa; then she read out "Ten Thousand a-Year," and they both roared with laughter at the vagaries of "Mr. Titbitat Titmouse," at the green mop of hair the dyeing process resulted in, till Rennie looked at the clock, and jumped up, letting fall her half-bound book with a thud, exclaiming in affright,—

"Why, I declare, it is past seven o'clock, and grandpa is never later than six!"

"It is rather odd," responded her brother, in evident concern, which he tried to conceal. "Shall we go down to the Lodge? You might catch sight of them, for Mr. Denton is coming to dine with us, and perhaps some other gentlemen."

"Oh! yes, by all means, Jack!" she said, tremulously.

Away they hastened, his hand linked in her arm, to the gate, almost breathless with their haste.

"Do you see any sign of them?" he asked, anxiously.

"No, not a vestige. It's just like the story of Blue Beard; there isn't anything in sight, not even a flock of sheep."

"Oh, they will come up presently with a web rail, as Saunders used to say," he returned, cheerily. "Have you got your wrap well round your chest? It's a nasty, cold wind."

"Yes, Jack, I'm muffled up to my chin," she said, climbing up to the second rail of the gate, to get a better view of the road, and thinking what a thoughtful, loving soul her brother Jack was.

There was silence for some time, only broken by the rustle of the trees and the twittering of the birds; then she discerned several people turning the bend of the road, but there was no sound of talking; they seemed mute, and the upright, graceful figure of her grandfather was not among the gentlemen on horseback.

"Jack!" she gasped, incoherently, "grandpa is not with the party. Oh! Jack, Jack! something is wrong; they are carrying a hurdle! I can see it! I can see it!"

"No, no, Rennie! don't break a fellow's heart!" he answered, hoarsely. "I am blind! blind! Is that not enough?" and helpless, sightless, his heart wrenched with a fearful dread, he sank down on the stone that stayed the gate from banging off its hinges, prostrated at the awful thought that began to take possession of him.

Mr. Denton, seeing the little white figure, rode up hastily before the others, with that nameless something they bore in silence, could reach her.

"Miss Allison, dear child, as a very dear friend of yours and your family, permit me to conduct both yourself and brother to the house."

"I know what it is you are bringing!" she said, in a choking voice. "It is grandpa! He is dead! I am no child!"

Then, turning to Jack, who seemed dazed, she led him into the mansion, and said, in a far-away voice, and glassy eyes that seemed riveted on space,—

"Stand here, Jack; we have to meet grandpa, if not in life in death, at the threshold of his own roof."

Mechanically the poor lad obeyed, and the men bore the hurdle in, and beneath a lavender-scented sheet hastily put on by one of the farmer's wives, lay all that was once mortal of one of the truest and best of men and gentlemen.

The servants all stole on tiptoes with faces deluged in tears—real genuine tears—at the loss of a kind, just master.

Not a tear did Rennie shed before them, they seemed to have fled; but with stately tread she led the way to the drawing-room, motioned the bearers to leave their burthen in the centre of the room, then followed them out and shut the door.

Was the fountain dried up now that she was alone with her precious dead? No, thank Heaven, no!

She flung aside the sheet and knelt down, taking the cold, stiff hand in hers, and bowed it with tears and kisses, and gazed into the noble face, the majesty of death illumining the clear-cut features; she sobbed,—

"Darling grandpa! dear, loving heart! your guardian angel warned me of this. Why did you not listen to my pleadings! Yet why should I begrudge you to Him who has called you! Perhaps mother wanted you, and asked Heaven to summon you!"

And thus she babbled on incoherently until her faithful nurse found her and led her away.

The sad accident cast a gloom throughout the whole county, where he was universally loved and respected.

It seemed that in leaping over some bracken his gun—a new one and fully cocked—became entangled, and in extricating it, it went off and shot him dead on the spot, a catastrophe no one could have averted.

The days that followed were passed by Rennie ransacking all the hothouses of their choicest blossoms which she wove into chaplets and garlands to lay at the feet of her beloved dead.

In this loving task her heart's bitter anguish found peace from its torrid grief, and hand in hand with Jack the domestics would meet them either going or coming from the room they had created into a shrine.

The day of the funeral, to their further dismay, Miss Eleanor Lyth was taken dangerously ill, brought on, the doctor affirmed, by the shock of her father's sudden death.

Muffled footsteps and subdued whispers still reigned in the house of mourning, notwithstanding the blinds were once again raised to admit the light and sunshine.

Rennie, feeling terribly disconsolate and wretched, implored her aunt to permit her to stay and nurse her, but was repelled so harshly that the poor child burst into tears and fled out to seek Winter to take her place beside the querulous sufferer.

When the mourners returned the family lawyer, in the presence of Mr. Denton, sealed all the boxes and drawers of the late Baronet's until the arrival of the new one.

"This is where Sir Capel kept his will," the lawyer observed, as he sealed up with especial care an old ebony and silver scribtoire that stood beside his bed. "Safe blind safe find is the motto of us men of the law."

"Quite right, sir," returned Mr. Denton, as they left the room, and joined the group of gentlemen in the library, who had come to pay their last respects to their old friend.

Rennie sat and watched them as they one and all departed with downcast faces, some on foot, some in their carriages; the heavy black crape robes seemed to pin her down to her chair, to hamper her weary limbs, while her sunny eyes were dim and hollow for want of sleep; and when her heavy head touched the pillow that night she felt that sweet, refreshing sleep would be a boon indeed, but one that she was not doomed to enjoy for long; and scarcely had she passed into dreamland when Winter stood, candle in hand, her face laden with alarming tidings, saying,—

"Wake up, dearie, your poor aunt is taken worse, and is calling for you."

"Is she dying?" Rennie cried, in distress.

"I cannot say. I only know she is mortal bad, dearie."

Rennie thrust her feet into her slippers—Winter aiding in putting on her dressing-gown—and faltered, as she sped up to the sick room,—

"Oh! perhaps it is not so bad; she may get well yet."

"Be prepared for the worst," she interposed, soothingly. "Doctor Wynne is with her. I sent for him the moment I saw the change, and he bade me fetch you."

Dr. Wynne went forward and took the little hands in his and led her to the bed where lay the dying woman, for there was no mistaking that grey shadow which hovered like a heavy veil over the wan, troubled face.

"Stoop down, child, and tell her you are here," he enjoined. "She is troubled; there is something on her mind."

"Auntie, dear, Rennie has come to sit by you to pray with you, if you will let her," she said, tenderly.

Only an incoherent sound came from the poor quivering lips and a feeble gesture towards the dressing-table.

"What can she want?" Rennie asked, in dismay, not seeing anything there she could possibly be pointing to.

The doctor went over to it and touched the bottles and jars, then he touched a jewel-case, and the sufferer tried to articulate something and made him understand to bring it to her.

They opened it and placed it down where her hands could touch its contents—poor listless hands whose restlessness had died for ever. They closed over a very old-fashioned bracelet, whose medallion was a large heart of pearls; this she placed in Rennie's hand and tried her hardest to say something as she pointed to it.

"I see what she means," Rennie said, tearfully, looking at the inscription on the inside of it. "This was my poor dear mother's. See, it says, 'Kate Lyth, on her eighteenth birthday, from her affectionate father, Capel Lyth,' she wishes to restore it to me," and she clasped it round her wrist and laid it caressingly on the withered hand of her aunt.

Yet it seemed to afford her no peace or comfort, and she made several vain attempts to speak, but only a guttural sound issued from the clammy lips. After a while the fast glazing eyes closed, and she fell into an unconscious state.

Before the flowers woke up from their slumbers and the sun bathed the earth in its hazy pink glory, the spirit of Eleanor Lyth was set free to

meet at the crystal river the loved ones gone before.

The poor heavily-burdened heart was released at last from its earthly cares and bitter disappointments which had wrecked and ruined her life.

About a fortnight after the second funeral Sir William Lyth and his daughter arrived, and the will, of course, was ordered to be read.

Rennie, with almost a scared face and manner foreign to her frank, fearless nature, went forth to receive the travellers.

Jack stood in the rear trying to catch the sound of his uncle's voice, a habit he had contracted since his loss of sight; he could tell an enemy from a friend by that test.

Her sable dress heightened the extreme delicacy of her face and brought out its pallor with a vivid intensity.

"Welcome to Glenthorn, cousin!" she said, winningly, as a tall, regal girl, clad in costly silks and crapes, stepped out of the carriage.

She gave a supercilious glance at her cousin, merely taking the tips of her fingers for one moment, and dropping them coldly.

"I am thankful all these deaths are over before we arrived. It would have been a kind of charnel house to me!"

Rennie positively shrank back in terror from this cold-hearted, imperious girl; she felt there existed an icy barrier between them that moment.

Sir William, a dark, square-jawed man, with keen, dark eyes and thick eyebrows that gave him a saturnine expression, shook hands with Jack and Rennie, then passed through the drawn-up line of servants, his daughter on his arm, with a cold, haughty mien that conveyed,—

"Keep your place, menials, and remember I am master, in every sense, here."

"He's not altered a jot except to be a little older," Winter said to herself, as she peeped through the rank, stolidly keeping in the background. "His face is just as hard and his eyes as vindictive. It isn't Edna Winter that will bow and scrape to him!"

Her companions bowed and curtsied respectfully, in spite of her insubordination.

"His daughter is a chip of the old block. My sweet pet will never get on with her!"

CHAPTER IV.

"Not to be found, Mr. Dyson? But you say my father placed it in that scribtoire."

"That is where he always kept it under lock and key. I saw him lay it here beneath this packet. It is incomprehensible, for I am as certain as I am now talking to you that he never destroyed it," the lawyer remarked, earnestly.

"It was a ridiculous will to make from what you tell me, one that in a moment of sound reason he evidently destroyed," Sir William said, in a tone of relief.

"I beg to differ, Sir William. Nothing could convince me that he would die and leave his two orphaned grandchildren helpless on the world's mercy!"

"Whether you believe it or not it is an undisputed fact," the Baronet retorted, loftily. "You have turned out every place, hole and corner, you will admit, and the seals have, I presume, never been tampered with?"

"No; I found them just as I left them. Besides, whose interest would it be, supposing I had not even taken that precaution, to steal the will?"

"Then rest assured my view of the case is correct. My father, in a momentary fit of repentance for leaving so unjust a will—I must say unjust, painful as it is to speak thus of the dead—got rid of it."

"If your theory is right, Sir William, it was done with the intention of making another, which his sudden death prevented. All I can say is, I am deeply sorry for his grandchildren; it will be a terrible blow to them."

The Baronet did not reply; he very coolly locked up the scribtoire in a way to hint the conversation was at an end. Mr. Dyson

howed and took his leave to catch the up-train for London, a cloud of perplexity on his face he could not dispel, and a soft corner in his heart for that winsome, black-clad girl who had placed her hands in his, and thanked him so gratefully for his kindness to her on the day of the funeral in relieving her of all care and worry.

Not a syllable escaped either Jack or her when their uncle acquainted them with the fatal news; they seemed petrified, turned into stone. At last Rennie burst the fetters that froze all speech, and gasped,—

"Then we are beggars, and my poor brother is blind!"

"That is the state of the case," he rejoined, coolly. "Of course you know what your Bible tells you, 'The sins of the father fall upon the children, and—'"

"Forbear, sir! I will not stand by and hear my dead parents condemned by you!" Jack cried wrathfully. "Who are you that you dare to assume the Divine prerogative of judging your fellow-men!"

"You are certainly very insolent! I should advise you to adopt a milder tone when addressing your elders!" he retorted, sarcastically. "That you have cause to feel aggrieved I can quite understand, but I fail to see how I am the cause of your ire."

"Do not, I implore you, say any more," Rennie faltered, clinging to Jack in a paroxysm of alarm lest he should say something more to increase the breach between their uncle and themselves.

"Do you think I care for what a stripling says!" the Baronet sneered.

"If my grandfather had been alive you would never have insulted his dead daughter or her children!" he said, fearlessly. "If I had my sight this misfortune would have had no effect on me; I could have worked—ay, night and day—with a cheerful spirit to keep my sister from a galling existence of dependence among people who are aliens to us, whose natures are in direct opposition to ours."

"Your tongue, young sir, will get you into mischief unless you take my advice, and remember the old axiom that speech may be silver but silence is golden. If you expect any charity at my hands you will have to be less insolent and presumptuous!"

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THE MYSTERY OF ALANDYKE.

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CHAPTER X.

BEATRICE STUART had no idea that Mrs. Clifford was one of the best musical critics of the day; she had never heard it whispered that the doctor's pretty young wife had been the star of fashionable concerts before she came to make a happy home out of that quaint, red-brick house.

Bee's only feeling was that Dr. and Mrs. Clifford would sympathize with her; she felt instinctively that the blooming young matron would understand her dislike to teaching, that she and her husband would not preach long homilies on the subject of the dangers, snares and temptations of the musical profession.

So sitting down to the piano in her shabby dress, without a shadow of nervousness or fear, Bee warbled forth her song, and when it was ended the pink colour flushed up into her cheeks, as she waited for her friend's verdict.

But it did not come; they said nothing, absolutely nothing. Bee felt injured; if her singing was so very bad surely they might say so; it was cruel to keep her there in suspense.

The doctor stood leaning against the mantelpiece; his wife crossed the room and put another song before Bee.

"Sing that, dear."

It was more difficult than the other, a passionate lament for a love that was dead and gone; but Bee sang it as though she were the character—as though she felt every word she

uttered. Her clear, sweet voice rang out through the room, its deep tenderness, its liquid music touching Mrs. Clifford's heart.

She bent over the girl and kissed her.

"Bee, you need never teach again; you need not fear Mr. D'Arcy employing you in his business. You have a fortune in your voice."

"And you think people would care to hear me!"

"I think that in a few months half London will tell you by their presence they care very much indeed."

The doctor came up to them smiling. "And so you are to be an artiste. Well, Beatrice, it might be a dangerous life for some girls, but I think you are safe."

"But I am not an artiste yet," said Bee, with a little sigh. "Do you think the manager of the Theapian would try me? You see, I must do something soon, so that I can leave Bilby-road before my mother and her husband come home."

"Where is your sister?"

Bee's eyes filled with tears as she narrated Nell's extraordinary silence.

"Mrs. Ward promised to write to Lady Daryl."

"Then you mustn't leave Mrs. Ward till the answer comes; but you know, Beatrice, she won't approve our scheme."

"Oh, no."

"You had better come and stay with us," said Mrs. Clifford, gently. "Pack up your things to-night, and come here to-morrow. You can give your lessons just as usual for a day or two; and I have a plan in my head which I think would be better than going to see the manager of the Theapian."

The Theapian was a local music-hall of very third-rate celebrity.

Bee's eyes sparkled.

"But shan't I be a great trouble to you?"

"Not a bit of it," said the Doctor.

"It is not many years ago that I was what you wish to be, Beatrice," said his wife. "I always feel an interest in anyone who means to be a singer."

Bee's landlady was mildly tearful over her departure.

"I am sure, miss, I don't know what I shall say to your me."

"She won't care," retorted Bee, a little bitterly. "She's got Mr. D'Arcy; she won't want anyone else."

The woman shook her head sadly.

"She's got him right enough, and I'm thinking before long she'll wish she hadn't; he's a bad-tempered man, Miss Bee, if ever there was one."

But when the packing was finished, when everything was ready for her to leave the humble home, a strange regret seized Bee. She loved Nell better than anyone else in the world; in spite of Nell's coldness her heart yearned to her sister. What if Nell came back to Bilby-road seeking her and found her gone!

Something of this she whispered to the landlady; that astute female shook her head.

"She'll never come back, Miss Bee."

Comforting this,

"Why not?"

"He won't let her."

"Mr. D'Arcy! He couldn't help her coming to the door. She wouldn't know that mother was married, and I was gone."

"I don't mean him, Miss Bee."

Bee gasped,—

"Whom then?"

"Law, to think you never had a suspicion of it, nor Mrs. Stuart either. Why, Miss Helena had a young man."

If she had said Miss Helena had a young elephant Bee wouldn't have looked more astonished, and yet how much it explained. All that had been mysterious in Nell's conduct seemed plain enough to her little sister now.

"I seed 'em more than once a sweethearth together in the dark evenings before Christmas," confided the landlady, with the loquacity of her class. "He was one of the finest young gentlemen you ever saw, and he seemed just wrapped up in your sister."

"Who was he?"

"How should I know that, Miss Bee! He was a real gentleman, anyhow, very different from the one your ma's married."

"But Nell went away," said the girl wonderingly. She went to Yorkshire, and she said she was glad to go. Why did she leave him?"

"Maybe they quarrelled, miss. Anyhow, if you don't hear from your sister depend upon it they've made it up and are married. You see, Miss Bee, Bilby-road's a nice place, very quiet, and respectable, but it's hardly the style Miss Helena's young man's been used to. Dear, dear! you could tell that just by looking at him."

It was not a pleasing idea that her sister had married a man too grand to be introduced to her family, but yet the story had a shade of reality about it, and some presentiment came to Bee that it was true.

"But if she should come back," persisted the girl, with a sob in her voice, "if she should come back some day, will you give her my dear love, and tell her I couldn't bear to stay here after mother married, but Dr. Clifford has my address!"

The landlady promised. Bee and her few possessions went out to the four-wheeled cab, and a few minutes later Miss Clifford had welcomed her visitor, and installed her in the bright cheerful spare room which was one of the features of the red-brick house.

There was a grand discussion that evening over Bee's plans. The doctor drew up a kind of circular, stating that her mother's unexpected marriage had obliged her to leave the neighbourhood, and she must therefore resign her pupils.

This was copied in Bee's stiff, school-girl hand, and sent to the parents and guardians of the children whose clumsy performances on the piano had so tortured Bee's musical ear. No copy was sent to Acadia House, for the doctor judged that Beatrice owed a personal explanation to one who had done so much for her sister as Mrs. Ward.

It was not a pleasant interview. It took place three days after Mrs. Stuart's wedding. Each morning Bee had tried to find an opportunity and failed, but on this occasion the principal herself waylaid her with an open letter in her hand.

"My dear, I have bad news for you."

But Bee had adopted the idea that Nell had left Yorkshire to be married, therefore she was not so very much overcome at Lady Daryl's letter.

It was very short, merely saying that Miss Stuart had left Alandyke unexpectedly in the end of March. She had neglected to leave her address, and so Lady Daryl had been powerless to send on the letters which had come to her. She now enclosed these to Mrs. Ward, hoping she would convey them to the young lady's family. She concluded with cordial expressions of goodwill. Evidently she was not angry with her late governess.

"What on earth does it mean?" asked Mrs. Ward.

Bee's voice had a ring of hope.

"She will come back some day."

"But don't you see the impropriety of the course she has taken, the extreme recklessness!" Bee shook her head.

"Nell was never improper. I'm afraid we are both great disappointments to you, Mrs. Ward."

"You have not disappointed me, Beatrice."

"But I shall do. I wanted to tell you I am going to give up teaching. I believe my voice will make my fortune, and so I am going to be a singer."

"Who has been perverting you?"

She was a liberal-minded woman enough, but she had an intense hatred of things theatrical. Music and singing were accomplishments in her idea when practised in the seclusion of home, but they became sins of awful blackness when performed in public for the delight of an audience who had paid their money for the right of listening to them.

"No one has perverted me. I am poor, and

I have a voice; therefore I conclude Heaven meant me to use it for my support."

"Don't be profane."

"I'm not," said Bee, wearily; "at least I hope not. I didn't mean to shock you."

"I am deeply grieved."

"You weren't half so angry when you thought I had fallen in love with someone."

Mrs. Ward was silent for a full five minutes; then with tears in her eyes she offered Bee a home at Acacia House if she would give up her mad plan.

And Bee refused it.

"Don't think me ungrateful," she said, warmly; "but I hate teaching. I'm not like Nell. The very thought of doing nothing else from year to year almost kills me."

"I hope you will never do anything worse."

And so they parted. Mrs. Ward would not see the white hand Beatrice put out in farewell, would not allow her to give another lesson in her school, and told her frankly that from that moment all connection between them must cease.

She was a good woman, but a very prejudiced one. Her cold, practical remarks jured on Bee.

"Don't be afraid," retorted the girl. "I shall never try to come here to contaminate your pupils. I shall be as dead to you and them as if the same world did not contain us both. If I were starving for want of a piece of bread I wouldn't take it from you after what you have said this evening."

But, indignant though she was, there was a pain at her heart. This quarrel with Mrs. Ward seemed to cut off a link with Nell, and when the doctor's wife greeted her young friend on her return she saw the traces of tears in the dark-blue eyes.

"Who has been vexing you, child?"

And Bee told her.

"I wonder good people are so ill-natured."

"It isn't true," pleaded Bee. "Dear Mrs. Clifford, tell me it isn't true that I am so wicked!"

"You are not wicked a bit, child. You wouldn't have been given a voice unless you were meant to use it. Now, if you were married, and your husband objected to your singing in public, things might be different."

"I shall never have a husband."

Mrs. Clifford looked at the beautiful face and differed from her decidedly.

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen."

"When I was seventeen I said the same. I thought there was nothing in the world so sweet as liberty, but you see I had not seen Dr. Clifford then."

Bee smiled.

"But that's not my reason. I don't care for my liberty the least bit in the world, only I think young men are so stupid."

"You ridiculous child."

"But it's true. I'm sure in books girls get full of worries and bothers directly they're engaged, and I don't like worry. I like to glide along life smoothly. I don't think it is in my nature to love anyone as enthusiastically as girls do who are engaged. I shouldn't mind being loved. I should like it very much if he wouldn't expect too much in return."

Nina Clifford marvelled. She knew a good deal of human nature, and she saw Bee meant just what she said. She would make a sweet, even-tempered wife, but she would never give her husband a passionate, romantic affection. Looking at her grace and beauty, her pretty ways and evident delicacy, it came into Mrs. Clifford's head that if ever girl were suited by character and disposition to become an old man's darling, that girl was Beatrice Stuart. Her heart would never oppose her judgment. She would have a bright and prosperous career just because her feelings seemed so certain never to carry her away by their impetuosity.

But she never said a word of this.

"One of my cousins is coming to-night. He so seldom honours us that I want to make quite a *fête* in his honour. You must look your best, Bee."

Two bright pink spots came in Bee's cheeks, but she said nothing. She was thinking that

the only party dress of any kind which she possessed was an old black one, which had done duty at three Christmas dances at Acacia House. Mrs. Clifford would gladly have helped her, but the doctor's wife was small and petite. Any of her dresses would have been too short for this young giantess. She could not offer the girl money, and so she was perforce obliged to leave her to her own resources in the matter of toilet, thankful that she had not whispered that her cousin was the manager and director of a series of fashionable concerts, and that he had come down to Camberwell only because she had earnestly entreated him, at least, to hear Beatrice sing before he decided she was incapable of taking the place of one of his lady artists just then laid aside by illness.

CHAPTER XI.

NINA CLIFFORD knew the world thoroughly and she understood her cousin perfectly. The more she said of Bee the more exacting he would become. Therefore, when he arrived, she received him alone in the drawing-room, never even mentioned her *protégée*, but expressed the pleasure she and her husband felt at seeing him, just as though he had come from St. John's Wood to Camberwell solely and simply to enjoy their hospitality.

She had sung often for Cousin Dick in days gone by, and he had rated her pretty soundly for deserting the concert stage; but they remained good friends, and perhaps Mr. Almslie had kept single all these years because he had cared for Nina a little too much.

She looked as fair and elegant as when she sang night after night to an enraptured audience, and nearly as young too. Mr. Almslie surveyed her critically.

"I can't think how it is, you look just the same. Most women slunk into dowdies directly they're married. You seem as natty as ever!"

She laughed.

"Nell is rather fussy about my appearance. I think he rather hates dowdies as much as you do!"

"Sensible man! And now, Nina, what about your *protégée*? I daresay she thinks she's got a voice; but it's no joke to bring out a *débütante* in the middle of a London season."

Nina stooped down to do something to her dress.

"I thought there could be no harm in your hearing her!" she said, quietly. "Of course we don't want you to run any risk on her account. If you really think she won't do any good as a singer, she might board in some respectable family and attend the Academy of Music!"

"That's expensive! I thought she was poor!"

"Awfully, but—" she hesitated—"we might be able to help her a little till she could stand alone. She really is very much to be pitied; her mother has just married again, and—"

"Distressed female, I see! But, Nina, remember, because a girl's unhappy and poor she's not bound to make a success on the stage. What's she like to look at! There's a great deal in that—first sight, you know!"

Poor Nina remembered her *protégée's* shabby dresser.

"I don't think you will like her appearance, Dick; but I am sure that could be altered!"

She saw her husband's browham coming up the drive, and with a word of apology went out to meet him. Mr. Almslie leant back in his chair and groaned.

"There's nothing more trying than to have benevolent people for relations. Nina and her husband'll look on me as a monster of cruelty if I don't give this girl 'a chance.' They forget that if she falls it's a dead loss to me, and that a young lady who attracts pity by looking meek and depressed isn't the kind of person to take with a fashionable audience."

The door opened, and a girl entered. For one moment Mr. Almslie thought his cousin had been deceiving him—then he concluded this was not the *protégée*; but some other young lady staying in the house.

She was above the middle height; her tall, supple figure was arrayed in soft black draperies;

"Mrs. Clifford won't be long!" said Cousin Dick, finding himself obliged to play host, and thinking what a sensation the stranger's beauty would make in London—the firm white throat and lovely rounded arms looked so soft and snowy against their frame of black. "Pray sit down."

Bee obeyed; she felt very well satisfied with her efforts to do honour to Mrs. Clifford's guest.

He was a man rather more than forty. Quaint and sarcastic in manner, warm and tender in heart, he was always saying unkind things and doing kind ones. Nina Clifford had known what she was about when she tried to interest him in her *protégée*. If he once took to her, Bee's future might be considered safe.

"Staying here?" he asked Bee presently. "I hate Camberwell, but Clifford and his wife seem to have made a nice little place of this house."

Bee's eyes commended his taste.

"I never thought anywhere in Camberwell could be so nice. I used to hate it awfully."

"You know it before, then?"

"Oh! I lived here for years and years!"

"And you're going away?"

"No," very gravely; "I don't quite know where I'm going next. It doesn't depend on me."

"I see."

"What?" asked Bee, laughing. "I can't think what you found to 'see' in my answer." Mr. Almslie was not in the least aggrivated.

"Yes, you mean you're engaged to be married, and you don't know where you'll have to live."

"I don't know in the least where I'm going to live. But I'm not engaged to be married."

"Ha!"

At this juncture Dr. Clifford and his wife entered. They both had tact enough not to remark on the *à la tête*, and dinner being announced, as Cousin Dick took Mrs. Clifford in he asked in an audible whisper,—

"Where's the *protégée*?"

"Coming." Which was true, since Bee was following them on her husband's arm.

Dinner was a great success; they talked of lots of different subjects. Now and then Mr. Almslie looked round as though he imagined the *protégée* would appear with the fruit at the dessert. His host and hostess wondered at these extraordinary glances. They had no idea Dick ignored the fact that the girl to whom he was so very attentive, was no other than the much-depressed young woman he had abused.

The gentlemen did not linger over their wine. The dining-room and drawing-room were separated only by a partition not remarkable for its thickness; and through this presently arose sounds which attracted Mr. Almslie's eager attention.

He listened in breathless silence.

"Nina is right," he said to the doctor when the song was over; "that girl has a fortune in her voice. It is a pity she is so bad-looking."

Dr. Clifford started.

"I thought she was very pretty. Didn't you?"

"I haven't seen her."

"I beg your pardon! You sat next her all dinner time," observed his host.

"Do you mean that that was your *protégée*?"

"Certainly!"

"That girl?"

"Yes."

"With golden hair and a figure like a willow?"

"Yes. What makes you so surprised?"

"Your wife told me her appearance was against her. I always thought Nina spoke the truth! What on earth did she mean?"

"I can explain that. Beatrice Stuart is awfully poor, and just as proud as she is poor. Her dress and her general get-up have been a perpetual trouble to us, since we daren't offer to provide her with better ones, and they seemed to have been made in the days when she was much shorter. Nina wanted to prepare you for her shabby appearance."

"She isn't shabby!" indignantly. "She is beautiful!"

"That's it. My dear Ainslie, if she'd been plain we should have noticed that her dress was a cheap one which had seen more wear than is often expected of its kind."

"You needn't abuse her because she's poor!"

"I don't want to abuse her!"

They went to the drawing-room, and Bee sang again and again. Mr. Ainslie chose the songs, putting them on the desk one after the other. He found fault with one of her shakes, and bluntly told her that she stooped; but Bee took all his fault-finding in good part, and really believed him to be a very well-meaning elderly gentleman.

She little knew the influence he was to have over her life. A surprise was in store for her as great and sudden as that he had already received.

"Well!" he cried, facing round on her, when Mrs. Clifford had insisted on the piano's being shut. "Well, Miss Stuart, when can you come to London? I can't wait long, you know. This is Thursday; suppose we fix Saturday?"

Poor Beatrice thought he was going mad. Mrs. Clifford came to the rescue.

"She doesn't understand, Dick. I don't believe she has the least idea."

Dick stared at her.

"Don't you know who I am?"

"Mr. Ainslie."

"Yes, but— Wall, what did I come here for?"

"To see your cousin," much perplexed.

"Yes, but for something else. Nina invited me to hear you sing. There's a vacancy in my company of artists, and she thought you could fill it."

Bee's eyes danced.

"And could I?"

"I reckon so. Now, Miss Stuart, I'm the director of the Malerton popular concerts; what do you say to being my second soprano? I'll give you eight pounds a week for the rest of the season, and take you in the provinces afterwards. Now, then, do you agree to those terms, eh?"

Bee gasped. The Malerton popular concerts were famous throughout the land, royalty attended them. It seemed too wonderful to be true, and eight pounds a week! Why, it was more than five times the slender sum which constituted her mother's income.

"Do you really mean it?" she asked the musician, who had opened such a dazzling prospect to her wondering eyes.

"Mean it, of course I mean it; there's no reason why you shouldn't be earning double that next year if you make anything like the success I expect."

"I shall never be able to spend it all," gasped Bee. "Oh, how good you have been to me!" and she took Mrs. Clifford's hand affectionately. "It isn't a week yet since I came to you just as miserable as ever I could be, and now—"

"And now you have bright prospects," said Nina, kissing her. "Well, suppose you tell my cousin you accept his proposal!"

In a few simple, grateful words Bee did so. Dick Ainslie shook hands with her, and told her she had nothing to say thank you for.

"And now to business, Miss Stuart. Where shall you live? It must be in London somewhere for the next four months, you know!"

Bee looked troubled.

"Mr. D'Arcy's establishment is in the city," she said, with a little sigh. "Please, don't make me live anywhere near that."

They laughed at her, they really could not help it. They told her that having passed the age of sixteen she was free to choose her own life, and they did not think either Mr. D'Arcy or her mother would attempt to make her return to them.

"You could ensure against it still more if you liked," said the director, kindly; "there is nothing easier than to take another name."

"I'd rather not," the blue eyes filled with tears. "I should feel as if I was ashamed of my own name if I took another. Besides, there's my sister; it would be easier for her to find me if I was still Beatrice Stuart."

"Beatrice Stuart be it, then; and now, where will you live? Shall I send you a list of places to-morrow? I dare say Nina would go and look at them with you."

"Please!"

He sent the list, and Mrs. Clifford gave up a whole day to the search, but Bee was hard to please; she point-blank refused to board with anyone. She said if they were dull they would make her miserable; she also objected to all houses which contained young men, alleging that they were such horrors.

Mrs. Clifford found her a little hard to please; but at last they discovered two pretty rooms in a quiet house near the Edgware-road, which a childless couple of decent education wished to let. Bee was charmed with the old people; the terms were low, and the landlady had an intense admiration for music, so the practising would be no objection.

That very day Nina established her young friend at No. 44, Arnot-place, which was a paradise of elegance compared to Bilby-road; and then with rare tact she broke to Bee the fact that the plain black dress, becoming as it was, would not suit as her only festive attire.

Bee protested and entreated, but the doctor's wife gained the day. Ten pounds were judiciously laid out in tasteful additions to Miss Stuart's wardrobe, and having achieved her point Nina went home, leaving a very happy, grateful girl in the pretty apartments.

But first Bee clung to her.

"You won't tell them!"

"Tell who, dear!"

"Mamma and Mr. D'Arcy. Oh, Mrs. Clifford, I think it would kill me if they came here. You won't give them my address?"

"Certainly not, be quite easy about that, Bee. The doctor says he must refuse your address to everyone, friend and foe alike, but that we can undertake to forward any letters; by that means you would not lose any chance that came of finding your sister."

Bee gave a little sigh.

"I don't feel as if I should ever see her again. Oh, Mrs. Clifford, I can't bear to think of Nell; I always seem to see her when I shut my eyes, lying white and cold and stiff."

"Don't, child," said her friend, kindly; "things may not be so bad as you fancy."

And then she said good-bye, and went home.

She found on her return to Camberwell that Beatrice had not left her guardianship a day too soon. The servants told her that two people were waiting to see her on particular business. They had declined to give their names or to call again, and were still seated in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Clifford had a shrewd suspicion who they were. She removed her hat and jacket leisurely, and then went downstairs to receive her persistent visitors.

She had never seen Mrs. Stuart, and she looked in vain for any of her daughter's beauty in the fair, self-satisfied woman before her; but the man's dark, swarthy face and evil eyes were too like Bee's description for her to have any doubt that the D'Arcys were before her.

"I have come for my daughter," began the female visitor, speaking with a boldness evidently not her own; "and I hope you will give her up quietly to us, who are her legal guardians."

Nina looked searchingly at the speaker, as though doubtful of her identity.

"May I ask your name?"

The man interposed.

"Madam, we have no wish to blame you; your kindness has been imposed on, and you have become the dupe of an idle, deceitful girl. We quite acquit you of all blame."

"I am glad to hear it," said Nina, coldly; "perhaps you will add to my obligation by telling me the nature of your business. I have but just returned from London, and I am in a hurry."

Mr. D'Arcy dropped his politeness.

"There's no use calling things by their wrong names," he said, spitefully; "we've come for my wife's daughter, and we mean to have her."

"As she is not in this house I fail to see how your remaining here will avail you."

"She has been here, you can't deny that."

"I never deny the truth; I have had the pleasure to receive and entertain Miss Beatrice Stuart, but she left my house this morning."

"It's false!"

Nina moved towards the bell rope, but the woman's voice stopped her. How it faltered. Had a week's experience of Mr. D'Arcy in the character of a husband really changed the complaining, exacting widow?

"I am sure you mean kindly, ma'am. I know your husband was very good to me years ago when the children were ill; but you see, ma'am, Bee's place is at home."

"Did your husband think so, Mrs. D'Arcy, when he addressed a letter to her, warning her he meant her to support herself?"

"Charles did it for the best. Teaching's poorly paid at the best, Mrs. Clifford. In my husband's establishment the girl could have earned a mint of money."

"What is the nature of the establishment?"

She thought of Bee's suggestions of ice-creams and barrel organs, and wondered what the truth would turn out.

"I am actively engaged in the arts," said Mr. D'Arcy stiffly. "I do not perform myself, but I hold a responsible position in the great establishment of the Roaring Ram."

Nina Clifford's very heart sickened; she knew more of such things than Mr. D'Arcy had bargained for. The Roaring Ram was a music-hall of the lowest class near Whitechapel. Its popularity might enable it to pay its stars a moderately fair salary; but oh! the degradation, the society, the influence to which an engagement there would have exposed a girl of Beatrice's youth and beauty!

Mr. D'Arcy fancied the lady overawed by his importance.

"Beatrice can sing a little, not much; her voice wants training, but to oblige me I expect the manager of the Roaring Ram would have given her an immediate engagement."

Mrs. Clifford turned to the mother.

"And you approved of this?"

"Yes; Bee ought to do something for herself, she's a great girl now; my little income won't go far, and at seventeen Bee's old enough to shift for herself."

"She has shifted for herself," cried Mrs. Clifford, indignantly. "From this day forward you need trouble yourself no more about her."

"But we shall trouble," declared D'Arcy; "we mean to have her address."

"Not from me!"

They stood irresolute.

Nina rang the bell.

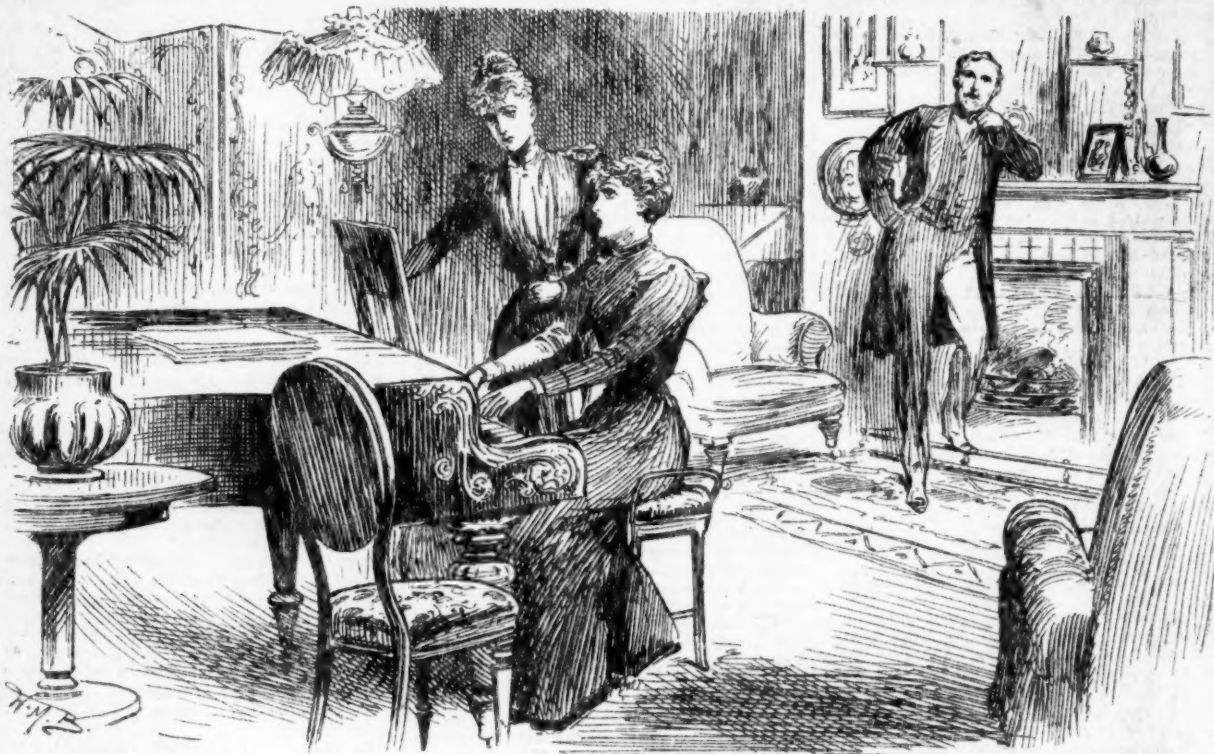
"The door for Mr. and Mrs. D'Arcy," she said, quickly, to the servant who entered. "All fresh applications must be made to my husband by letter. I utterly decline to hold any communication with you again."

There was something in her calm dignity which silenced D'Arcy's bombastic threats, and his wife's complaints. They said no more until they were safely outside the red-brick house, when no doubt they abused Mrs. Clifford to their hearts' content.

"But it doesn't matter, deary," the blithe little woman told her husband at dinner. "Bee is safe and happy, and they can't do us any harm."

Nor could they. Poor Mrs. D'Arcy heard some bitter truths that night. She had not been married for herself, not even for her little bit of money, but for her child. Her persistent habit of speaking of Beatrice as less than her real age had made D'Arcy think that for some years she would be under his control, and he could reap a fortune from her voice. He had believed her friendless, and thought she would welcome with delight a change from the drudgery of teaching. The threatening tone of his letter had been adopted to enforce her submission. The threat of the "establishment" was used to impress her with a sense of his authority.

And it had all failed—he had overreached him-



SHE SANG AS THOUGH SHE FELT EVERY WORD SHE UTTERED.

self. The very way he had striven to subjugate her had made her escape. He knew quite well, since she was over sixteen, he could not compel her to return to her mother's custody.

He treated his wife to a few very bitter home truths that night, and the poor woman regretted her fatal visit to the theatre that March evening, almost as bitterly as Beatrice had done.

"After all," she said, stung to defend herself, "you married me, not Bea. You ought to be glad you haven't got to support her."

"She'd have supported us, with her voice. We should have lived like fighting cocks."

Mrs. D'Arcy sighed. She had a liking for good things, and would quite have enjoyed to live like those pugilistic heroes for a little time.

"Well, it's no use crying over spilt milk," she observed, patiently. "There's the annuity which my pa, who was in the public line, settled on me. Nothing can take that from us."

"A fat lot that is—eighty pounds a-year."

Mrs. D'Arcy hinted his "respectable position in the establishment" must surely increase their income, but when she heard the said position was that of a billiard-marker her courage sank.

"What can we do?"

"Don't know," gloomily. "I wish I'd have cut off my right hand before I saddled myself with such a burden as a fretful, penniless wife."

Her tears were ready, but she drove them back by an effort.

"I'm sure in Italy you always seemed well off."

"I lived on your husband then. He was well off and a precious simpleton."

Some forgotten tenderness in her nature rose in defence of her children's father—the husband who had married her from sincere love, and lost father, home and fortune by the act.

"Don't talk against him, Charles—somehow I can't stand it. If he'd died at home in his bed it would have been different."

"Didn't he die at home in his bed?"

"No, he started on a long journey, and he never came back."

"But you heard of him! Surely at least some one wrote and told you of his death!"

She hesitated.

"I never told anyone—not even the girls."

"You will tell me."

She dared not disobey, and so she told him. Perhaps it was a relief to pour out the story she had so long kept secret.

Within a month of her husband's departure she received a letter in a quaint, crabbed hand saying that her husband, the writer's much-loved son, was dead. He—the writer—could never forgive her being the cause of his estrangement with his son, but as that son's widow he could not see her starve. He, therefore, enclosed a bank-note for fifty pounds, and told her she would receive the same half-yearly while he lived.

"And did you?"

"Yes, for five years, regular as the six months came round, a cheque would come. The children were young then, so I didn't tell them. I seemed to feel if I took the money I was bound to say nothing to anyone. I had ten cheques in all, and oh! the comfort they were to us."

"And then?"

"They stopped. I think the old gentleman must have died; his writing had changed very much in the five years."

"Where did he live?"

"I have no idea."

"But surely your husband—"

"My husband told me he had to choose between father, wealth, and lands, and me. He chose me, and he never mentioned his father again, until one day when things were at their worst, he said he would go down to Yorkshire and see if, for his mother's sake, the old man would help us."

"Yorkshire! We might get a book of landed gentry, and look up the name of Stuart. If your father-in-law made no will your children would be his heirs, and bound, in common decency, to do something for their mother."

"But the name was not Stuart. We only went by that when we got poor, because he couldn't bear anyone to know his fortunes had sunk so low."

"What was the real name?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!"

"I may have heard it, but I have forgotten. From the day I came out of church I was called Mrs. Stuart; in time I almost ceased to remember we had any other name. What does it matter?"

Charles D'Arcy decided that if ever woman was utterly devoid of reason and sense it was the wife he had sworn to love and cherish. Dark days were in store for the poor creature, since she had quite failed to bring him any of the prosperity for which he married her. No contrast could have been greater than that between him and her first husband. Never had she regretted her children's father so bitterly as now, when she wore another man's ring on her finger.

(To be continued.)

INDIARUBBER heels are to be attached to the shoes worn by the French soldiers. It is claimed that they decrease the fatigue of marching.

In America the "best" man is being superseded by the "best" woman. It is said that the notion has grown out of the needs of those people whose knowledge of society's ways of entertainments are somewhat elementary. The "best" woman has a good deal of responsibility resting on her shoulders. She is chosen for her familiarity with the management of a wedding function, probably having been bridesmaid on various occasions, and is expected to "run" it so as to be a success. She directs matters and prevents the confusion which so frequently mars such festivities, and for the time being is mistress of the ceremonies.



"MY DARLING!" HE SAID, "I HAVE SOUGHT YOU FOR MONTHS!"

HER GREAT MISTAKE.

—:—:—

CHAPTER XV.—(continued.)

"BUT we wrote to you," put in Pussy, prettily. "I wrote to Florence myself, and begged her to come to our wedding. It was terribly quiet, but I knew she would forgive that."

"We have been away from home," said Alan, quickly. "I never had your letters. I wanted to see Cecil on a little matter of business, and I cross-questioned his late landlady until she gave me his address; but, indeed, I had no idea I should interrupt his honeymoon."

"I'll forgive you," said Pussy, prettily. "I am going into the drawing-room now, and when you have quite done the business you must come to me there, and I will give you some coffee."

As she left the room, and Alan saw her feeble, wavering step, he understood that she had indeed been very ill. The fondness in Cecil's eyes as he looked at his young wife had at least convinced the Earl of his mistake. His cousin was guiltless. He had cruelly wronged him by his suspicions.

Captain Fane closed the door on his bride; then he came back to the other two.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "I could not press you to tell me before, because all anxiety or excitement is dangerous for my wife; but from the moment you came in I saw that some heavy trouble was upon you."

"You tell him," said Alan to his old friend. "Heaven help me, I cannot!"

"There has been some terrible misunderstanding," said Mr. Lyster, simply. "Lady Elsdale has left her home."

"Left her home!" cried Cecil, in horror. "When?—what drove her away?"

"It was the tenth of May. She was seen in your company on that day, and we thought you might have some clue to her whereabouts."

"For Heaven's sake help me, if you can!" said Alan, turning to his cousin in blank despair.

Of course I will help you; but you must

have been cruel to her to drive her to such a step. I suppose she told you all! I know you are a proud man, but the fault was none of hers. You might have forgiven her."

"She told me nothing. I have never seen her since I passed her in a hansom cab seated at your side."

"I was there by an accident," said Cecil, simply. "I met her, and when I heard where she was going I insisted upon accompanying her. It did not seem to me fit she should drive through such a neighbourhood alone."

"Where was she going?"

"Have you no idea?"

"None!"

"It is her secret. I doubt if I ought to tell you without her leave."

"You must tell me!" said Alan, hoarsely.

"The doubt and misery of all this are killing me."

"The last words to me were that she would confide all to you herself. She said anything was better than her present life."

"She was not happy," said the Earl, sadly;

"I always knew that."

"She was not happy," admitted Cecil. "She had two causes for sorrow. She had a secret which pressed heavily on her, and people had told her the story of your early love, and she believed, poor child, your heart had wandered from her back to Lady Dane."

"And she told you this!"

"She told me nothing but the secret—the rest I guessed. I hold no common interest in your wife, Alan. She is the daughter of my dear, dead friend, and she is Pussy's favourite relation."

"The secret," gasped Alan; "you are bound to tell it me."

"You married Miss Warburton as an orphan. Did you ever hear anything of her mother?"

"I heard that she was very beautiful, and that the Colonel never recovered her loss."

"Just so! He never recovered her loss—it broke his heart; but the word loss, in such sense,

generally means death. Mrs. Warburton did not die!"

There flashed upon Alan's mind the strange hints thrown out by Mr. Fox in his one *à-la-tête* with him.

"I don't understand!" he said, hoarsely.

"Within three days of her wedding Florence Warburton learnt that the mother she had mourned as dead was alive, and living in penury in London. The Colonel's wife had been sinning against, not sinning. Vicious tongues had made an estrangement between her and her husband. Too proud to exculpate herself she flew from home. It was only when Colonel Warburton sought his revenge he learned the truth. His wife had been true to him through all, and now she had left him because she could not bear to remain at his side and see that he did not trust her."

"And they were reconciled?"

Cecil shook his head.

"No; the Colonel believed her dead. He went out to India in that belief. She lived in London, and supported herself by needlework. She might have concealed her identity to the end, but rumour reached her that her daughter was on the point of marriage. The mother-love would not be denied a sight of her child. She went to Foxgrove, intending to let Florence believe she was her old nurse; but nature was too strong for them both."

A long, long silence.

"You are a proud man," said Cecil, hotly, "but you have no cause to blush for your wife. To my thinking, her mother's story is too sad and pitiful to call for anything but sympathy. Florence would have been unworthy of herself had she refused all intercourse with her. I can quite understand that she kept her secret only from fear of losing your love."

"Do you think she is with her mother?" cried Alan, eagerly.

"I am sure of it! On that day, when you saw your wife at my side, she had been to her mother, at the latter's urgent request. She was

she feared, very ill. She yearned for the sight of her daughter's face. If you want your wife, Alan, you will find her in loving tendance on Mrs. Warburton. And, I think, if your pride can ever forgive the existence of her mother, your wife will be the more precious to you for this temporary trouble."

Alan turned on him with bloodshot eyes.

"How am I to thank you?"

"By making her happy," was the short reply.

Alan's face lighted up with a strange new hopefulness.

"She shall be happy," he said, passionately.

"If I only find her I will make her forget all her sorrows. It was her great mistake to keep her secret from me. I may be proud, but whatever her parentage I could never have left off loving Florence. I will go to her to-night and tell her we will begin afresh, and that I will join with her in showing all honour and respect to her mother."

"You can't go to-night," said Cecil; "you won't be back in London till after ten."

"And you have not told me where."

Cecil gave the address, marvelling that he should have recollected it, and then he once more begged his friends not to mention the object of their visit before his bride.

"What does your mother say to your becoming a married man?" inquired his cousin.

"She is delighted."

"Mrs. Cecil Fane looks sadly changed from the sprightly Miss Fox I remember. What caused her illness?"

"Worry," returned Cecil. "Her mother almost killed her. I made up my mind we would never be parted again, and so I told Mrs. Fox I should stay at the Court until I took Pussy away with me. The doctor was on my side, and the old man too, so we planned a wedding by special license in the drawing-room at the Court, and dispensed with trousseau, bridesmaids, and wedding-cake; when Mrs. Fox reproached us we offered to dispense with her presence also."

"I am quite sure she did not accept your offer," said Alan, gravely.

"Oh, dear, no; she was there, and cried the whole time to think that a daughter of hers should be married in such a fashion."

"Well, I never thought you would go to the Court to seek a wife!"

"You set me the example."

"You look happy."

"You see," said Cecil, archly, "I followed your lordship's example in yet another detail. I fell in love with my bride before I knew that she was an inmate of Foxgrove Court."

"And where shall you live?"

"We shall spend the summer here; after that I suppose we must think of an establishment."

A message from Pussy summoned the gentlemen to coffee. She looked very anxiously at Alan as he came to sit by her.

"Is there anything the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You look so ill."

"I came here in great trouble, but Cecil has comforted all my fears, and I am going home in the best of spirits."

"You will tell Florence to write to me, won't you, Lord Eldale?"

He promised, but he was dimly conscious the while that his wife was not as yet restored to him. He might have much heavy disappointment yet to endure before he held Florence again in his arms.

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD ELSDALE went straight from Keston to his own luxurious mansion. He informed his servants that their mistress was detained by indisposition, and having undergone the torture of their inquiries and lamentations he found himself at last alone in his private sitting-room, a silver salver filled up with the correspondence which had accumulated in his absence in front of him.

He looked through the letters eagerly; perhaps he hoped against hope that one of them might bring him some tidings of his wife, but if so he

was disappointed. There were cards of invitation by the dozen, letters from friends and acquaintances, a few affectionate protestations as the dates grew recent respecting the extraordinary alliance of himself and his wife, but there was neither word nor line which told him more about Florence than he knew already.

He did not despair. He felt almost certain of finding his darling in Caroline-street. He had caught a ray of hope from Cecil Fane. Surely if Florence had gone to her mother she would remain with her. He quite forgot that his cousin had said Mrs. Warburton was dangerously ill.

There was very little sleep for Lord Eldale that night, but towards morning he dropped into an uneasy slumber; and it was past nine when he awoke with a start to find that it was already the hour at which he meant to be in Caroline-street.

Breakfast did not take long. The Earl got into his cab and drove to the corner of the Tottenham Court-road, and he alighted and walked briskly on until he came to Caroline-street. It was only when he knocked at the door that he remembered he had no idea by what name to ask for his wife.

"I want to see a lady who is staying here," he said, courteously.

"What name, sir?"

He hesitated.

"I think you have a lodger called Miss Daw?"

"Yes, sir. She was with us many years. I hope you did not want her?"

"I did—at least I wanted a young lady whom I thought I should find with her."

The woman seemed alarmed at the eagerness of his words.

"A slight young lady, sir!—dressed all in black, with soft, brown eyes, and a sad, sweet face?"

"Yes!" recognising the description at once.

"Will you let me see her?"

"She is not here, sir. She has left some days ago—more than a week."

Alan could have torn his hair.

"But you know where she is gone?"

The woman shook her head.

"Then Miss Daw knows! Let me see her!"

"She is dead, sir. She died the very day after the lady came. I don't know what relations they were, but she must have loved her very much—she cried so terribly when she was gone. She paid all Miss Daw's debts, and then she bought some beautiful white flowers, and sat all day making garlands for the coffin."

There was a great lump in Alan's throat.

"My good woman," he said, hoarsely, "I am a rich man. I will give you fifty pounds if you will tell me where that young lady went to!"

The landlady sighed.

"I'd like to have the money, sir! but it's no use; I don't know where she is gone."

"But, surely, she said something when she wished you good-bye?"

"She never said good-bye, sir. She paid up everything, as I told you, and then she sat counting the money in her little purse, and I'd a mind to tell her she could stay here a bit and not trouble about the rent until she could turn herself around. She was such a child, you see, sir; I knew she wasn't used to shifts for herself."

"And you told her so?"

"No, sir. I was just a-going when the bell called me downstairs, and I thought I'd speak to her in the evening. Well, I went upstairs when I had had my bit of supper, but she was gone!"

"Gone!"

"Just that, sir. She had packed up her few things in a little bag she had and gone. I thought at first she would come back. I sat up late that night waiting for her, and the next, too, but she never came!"

There was such blank misery—such utter hopelessness—written upon Alan's face that even the rough, uneducated woman was troubled.

"I was thinking, sir, Mr. Gibbs might be able to help you—he's the parish doctor, sir, and a good, kind man. It was he came to see Miss Daw when she was dying."

Alan pressed a handsome sum into the woman's hand and went out. He had little hope of Mr.

Gibbs' powers, but he resolved to try them, and found his way to the tall, gloomy house where the surgeon resided.

Mr. Gibbs was out. What hard-worked general practitioner in a poor neighbourhood would be found at home at eleven o'clock, unless it was a grating morning!

Alan waited until he grew almost mad with suspense. The clock was chiming one when Mr. Gibbs entered.

Now, the worthy doctor had had more than one conversation with Florence after her mother's death, and the girl's sweet, sad face had touched his very heart. She had told him she was poor and friendless—that she meant to work hard to keep herself; but she had not told him that she was a wife—whose whole heart was sore for lack of her husband's love.

Mr. Gibbs, seeing her rare beauty, her elegant attire, had hit upon a theory of his own, as utterly unfounded as it well could be. He pitied Florence, but this theory prevented him from asking her to his house, or even recommending her for any post in a family. He believed that the secret in her life was one of sin as well as sorrow. He was kind and merciful, but he felt that he could do nothing for her. He told her so when she asked his advice, adding that, in his judgment, her best plan was to go back to her relatives.

"London is no place for you," he said, kindly. "Indeed, indeed, you are better away under the protection of your relations!"

"But I have none! None who would befriend me!" said Florence, sadly. "There is no one now to care very much what becomes of me. I wish it were not wrong to take my own life! I am so weary—so troubled!"

"Nonsense!" said the doctor, almost roughly, though his eyes were not dry. "You mustn't talk like that, and before long you won't be so lonely."

Florence raised her brown eyes wistfully to his face.

"My dear," he said, putting one hand upon her shoulder in kind, fatherly fashion. "Don't you know that before many months are over you will have someone to care for, and to care for you!"

The girl flushed crimson. He little guessed the reason—little suspected the child whose advent, he feared, would only be another sorrow, was the lawful heir of an English peerage.

To Florence it had come home with a sharp, keen pain that the child Alan had longed for would never know its father's kiss.

"I think I am glad," she said, looking at the doctor with her sad, wistful face. "It is strange, isn't it? I haven't found this world a very pleasant place myself, and yet I am glad."

"And for your child's sake you will hear reason!—you will go home to your friends!"

"I think not," she said, fiercely. "I will try my own plan first. If that fails I will think of yours."

"Well, I will look in now and then to see how you get on."

But the next day he had a few lines, written in a delicate hand, saying he must forgive her, she could not stay in Caroline-street—she felt she must be away. He must not think her ungrateful. She should never forget his kindness.

When Mr. Gibbs saw Lord Eldale, and heard his errand, his manner frost. Following out his pet theory this gentleman was a very black sheep indeed!

"I have no idea of the young lady's whereabouts," he said, curtly; "and if I had I should not tell you. I hope she is safe under the protection of her own friends."

Alan looked at Mr. Gibbs in amazement.

"There is some mistake," he said, gravely. "She did not tell you her history—she did not tell you what part I filled in it!"

"I guessed it."

"And you think it right to separate husband and wife? I grant it I have failed miserably in my duty. I have not made her happy, but I love her as my own life."

"And she is your wife?"

A light broke upon Lord Eldale.

"Surely you never doubted!"

"She was alone and in trouble. She told me there was no one to care what became of her, that, but for its being a sin, she would gladly have taken the life which had become burdensome to her; she told me that. What could I think, but that she was alone in the world!"

"She is my loved and honoured wife!" cried Alan, hoarsely. "Mr. Gibbs, I would give my own life willingly to find her."

The kind old doctor wrung his hand.

"You'll find her yet," he said, cheerfully; "such a face as hers can't be hidden long. I shall live to see her at your side yet, and ask pardon of you both for my hasty judgment."

But his words awoke no answering echo in Alan's heart. The Earl felt that his beautiful young wife was lost to him for ever, that never more would he see the face he loved best on earth.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN the young Countess of Eldale left her humble shelter in Caroline street she had formed no plans for the future, excepting that she must seek another refuge, where everything would not remind her so painfully of the mother whose story had been so like her own.

She was less utterly wretched since she had heard Mr. Gibbs' disclosure. There was at least something to look forward to. It seemed to Florence that life would not be all misery when she held Alan's child in her arms; but her stock of money was falling fast, very few pounds remained to her; for the sake of that wonderful hope held out to her she must struggle to preserve the life she prized so little.

She took a small room in one of the many streets near Baywater, and she tried to collect her energies and think of some way of earning her own living. Teaching and companionship were both closed to her. Whatever employment she chose must be done at home. It was a difficult task. Miss Frost's pupil had been well educated, but she was without any very striking talent. It seemed to Florence there was nothing before her but doing fancy needlework for the shops. It was not a lucrative career, but it had these recommendations—it could be pursued at home, and it would not bring her face to face with her customers.

She met with greater success than she had expected; the elegant simplicity of her dress, the nameless grace of her whole appearance made a striking impression upon one or two of the chief depots for art needlework. They found that she worked well and quickly, that to careful execution she united quite a gift for designing, and before a month was over a very large West-end firm had engaged her at a salary which seemed ample for her few wants. She called herself Mrs. Warton, and wore her wedding-ring openly. It was generally supposed that her husband was abroad, and many were the condolences expressed to her on the subject.

Mesdames Ludd and Hillier, her employers, were pleasant well-to-do women of the middle class, a little fussy and exacting perhaps, but considerate enough to a clever worker whom it was their interest to keep.

Their connection was a large one, and almost entirely among the aristocracy. Often Florence found herself engaged at work for the decoration of drawing-rooms where she had been an honoured guest. At first a terror was on her of being recognised by some of her former friends; but she took care to pay her visits to Conduit-street at an hour when they would hardly have breakfasted, and she resolutely declined any commissions which would have necessitated her calling at their houses. It was a strange sort of life for a girl not yet twenty; but save for that awful pain at her heart, save for the yearning longing for her husband, Florence would not have been unhappy. She had never cared much for gaiety. She moved in time to more comfortable apartments—pretty rooms near Camden Town—where a bird sang in the window, and a large tabby cat made friends with the lodger when her day's toil was over.

Of Alan she heard nothing—she was quite cut off from all news of him. She could not tell how he received the tidings of her departure.

Had he mourned a little for the girl-wife, who had not been able to keep his love? or did he only regret that the law still bound him to her, and he was not free to pay his addresses to Lady Dane?

In July work slackened, London was emptying fast, and then Mesdames Judd and Hillier found time to take a holiday, and afford the same to their assistants. Florence was not sorry—she was feeling far from strong. There had come over her lately a presentiment that Alan would not have to wait much longer for his freedom—that before many weeks were over he would hear that his wife's life no longer stood between him and Sybil Dane.

It was in August that she went to Conduit-street a little later than her wont, and found her employers in a dilemma. One of their newest customers—a general and his wife newly returned from abroad—had sent for someone to go and inspect some rare Eastern silks which they had brought home with them, and designed for the hangings of a boudoir. The "young lady" whose province it was was away for her holiday; her deputy was ill, Miss Hillier had a cold, and Miss Ludd confined herself to the business arrangements of the firm—confessing, with charming frankness, she had no more eye for colour than a barn-door fowl.

"Such charming people!" she said to Florence, in a little burst of praise. "Only just come home—more money than they know what to do with, and yet no affectation or condescension."

"What is the name?"

"Anstruther. The General comes of a grand old family—poor and proud though; but he married an heiress—a lady who literally had more money than she knew what to do with, and they are a devoted couple. I'm sure they seem like lovers yet, and they have been married over twenty years. She was a widow, I think."

But this did not solve the difficulty. At last Florence remembered the Anstruthers had been in England six weeks. It was three months turned since she left her husband's home, therefore she need not fear their recognising in the embroideress the missing Countess of Eldale.

"Shall I go for you, Miss Ludd?"

"I wish you would; but you so expressly stipulated you should never be sent to private houses that I did not like to ask it."

"I do dislike it very much, but in this case there seems no help for it; and you say they are nice people."

"Charming! They live at Briarley. It would be quite a nice little excursion for you."

Florence did not agree to that, but having yielded the point she agreed to go that very afternoon; and the "firm" having given her a nice little lunch and generously defrayed her travelling expenses, she set out at once for Briarley Park.

Briarley, as every one knows, is fifteen miles from London, in the loveliest part of Surrey; the Park was the chief residence in the place, and Mrs. Anstruther had inherited it from her father some years before, only her husband was devoted to his profession, and she would not leave him, so that she waited to take possession of her estate until his term of service was up, and then the pair came slowly back to Europe, stopping at many a fair Asiatic city to make purchases, and returning literally laden with the spoils of the Far East.

The Park was near the station. Florence passed through the lodge-gates, and walked up a grand old avenue of spreading limes. She was a little curious as to her reception; she did not exactly know the greeting suited out to those of her new calling; she gave a little sigh as she reached the grand porticoed entrance, and saw the waiting footman in the hall; it reminded her a little of the splendours of the past.

"Can I see Mr. Anstruther?"

She was dressed plainly; but there was a something in her bearing which made the servant suppose she came of high degree.

"My mistress is in the grounds, madam," he replied, respectfully. "If you will kindly come into the drawing room I will send in search of her."

But Florence drew back; she did not think Mesdames Ludd and Hillier's assistants usually entered the drawing-rooms.

"I have come to see Mrs. Anstruther on business," she said, simply, with a little stress on the last word. "I am quite ready to wait until she is at liberty."

The man led the way across the tiled hall to a room which seemed to Florence like an Eastern palace. The girl's artistic eye revelled in the beauty before her, she never heeded the flight of time; she seemed drinking in the loveliness of the scene. Rising at last to get a better view of some curiosity, she saw a picture which made her very heart stand still.

Yet it was no work of art, no *chef d'œuvre*, only a portrait of a young girl in the first dawn of her womanhood, dressed in the costume of twenty years before.

No wonder Florence started. It seemed to her that the portrait was her own, the face was hers—hers as she had been fifteen months before, when she was a careless schoolgirl. The one word "Doris" was engraved beneath the picture; and then Florence understood all—the likeness was not hers, but her mother's.

But how could it be so? What link had bound her fair, sorrowful young mother to these rich and prosperous Anstruthers? What place had the portrait of the lonely woman in Caroline-street in this home of Eastern splendour?

She could not solve the question, she could only pray that her resemblance to the picture might not be so clear to the Anstruthers as it was to her, when she heard the rattle of a silken train, and the lady of the house appeared.

Florence need not have feared her greeting. Mrs. Anstruther was now not far from fifty years of age; her face was full of motherly kindness, and had a strange, wistful expression as though, despite her wealth, her husband's love, she needed something more to make her happy.

She was not discontented, not murmuring, only she never forgot that six little graves in different foreign burial grounds were all that remained to her of her children.

She looked at Florence inquiringly.

"I am very glad to see you—may I ask your name?"

Florence flushed.

"I have come on business," she said, simply; "about some hangings for a window."

Strong surprise was on the lady's face.

"You do not mean that you have come from a shop in Conduit-street?"

"Yes, Ludd and Hillier's."

"Are you one of their assistants?"

"Not precisely. I do not serve in the shop; I work for them at home, but to-day they had no one else to send, and so I offered to come."

"It was very kind of you. The General and I want to make our home as beautiful as we can."

"I think you have done that already."

Mrs. Anstruther smiled.

"It is our hobby. We are growing old; and I don't think we have a relation in the world."

Florence looked her interest and rose to follow Mrs. Anstruther; she had been sitting in the shade before. Now, as the sunlight caught her hair and turned it for a moment to waves of gold, her companion gave a great start.

"I beg your pardon, but I had been wondering ever since I came in of whom you reminded me—I see now."

She stood before the picture and called Florence to her side.

"I never saw such a startling resemblance!"

"Chance likenesses are strange things."

But Mrs. Anstruther was not to be put off.

"You might have sat for it."

In vain Florence moved towards the door.

"I wonder if the General will see it as plainly as I do. You see, poor Doris was his sister—not mine."

"Is she dead?"

"She died a great many years ago, and she was very unhappy."

Again Florence felt certain she was listening to her mother's story.

She went to the boudoir and the rare Eastern silks were examined. Florence's taste and skill proved quite equal to the occasion. Mrs. Anstruther was delighted.

"You seem to know things just by looking at them. Have you been doing this sort of thing long?"

"Not very long."

"Two or three years?"

"Two or three months."

"Ah," looking at her black dress; "I ought not to have asked. And do you like it?"

"Pretty well."

"Do you live at home all by yourself? It's very hard for you, a young girl like you."

"I am getting used to it," said Florence, simply. "I could not have borne to be with strangers while"—her voice shook—"my husband is away."

Mrs. Anstruther stared.

"Your husband! Why, you look a perfect child—you can't be a married woman!"

"I was married last December."

"And where is your husband? Why doesn't he stay at home and take care of you?"

Florence was saved all reply to the ever embarrassing questions by the entrance of no less a person than the General.

For a moment their eyes met—the master of untold wealth, the girl who toiled hard for daily bread. Florence saw a fine soldierly man of sixty, with a face full of kindness and good temper. General Anstruther saw, as it seemed to him, his fair young sister as he had parted from her on her wedding-day.

"My dear Isabel," he said, in a strangely-broken voice, "who is this young lady?"

His wife understood his emotion, and answered that rather than his question.

"Then you see the likeness, too? It was not only my fancy!"

"I see someone with my sister's face." He bent over Florence with stately courtesy. "I hope you will pardon an old man's curiosity and tell me your name."

"Florence."

For the life of her she could not have added a second name—her father's, the one Alan had given her at the altar and the one she bore now alike seemed impossible to her.

"Florence!" there was a strange sparkle in the old man's eye. "Isabel, don't you remember that was her child's name. She wrote to us while we were at Malta that she had called her baby Florence."

"Yes," said Mrs. Anstruther, simply; "but I thought someone—a Mrs. Fox, I think—wrote afterwards and told us that the little girl died when she lost her mother."

A sudden impulse seized on Florence. These were her mother's kindred—the very tie which Alan accounted shame would win their hearts towards her. She looked into Mrs. Anstruther's face with her sweet brown eyes.

"Do you know Mrs. Fox?" she asked. "She is my aunt. I lived with her after papa died, until I married."

The General wiped his eyes.

"There!" he cried, triumphantly.

"I felt it must be so," answered his wife. "My dear," to the girl, "if you are Colonel Warburton's daughter, you are our dear niece, the child of my husband's sister whom we lost long years ago."

Florence felt like a creature in a dream. She was sitting on a sofa at her aunt's side. The General paced up and down before them as though he could never tire of looking at his niece.

"Do you remember your mother, child?" he asked, abruptly; "but of course you don't. How could you when she died so long ago?"

"She only died last May," said Florence, sadly. "She lived on alone in want and penury. They taught me to believe her dead. It was only last November, three days before my wedding, that she came to me and told me."

"Poor Doris,"—the General blew his nose; "it was a wasted life."

"And then she lived with you," said Mrs. Anstruther, "until her death!"

"Oh, no, she would not let me tell anyone she was alive; she bound me by a solemn promise to keep the secret. She said that a shadow rested on her name—that she could never take her old place again."

"And your husband, child!" said the General, sharply; "how comes it that you are working for your bread? Why, your father's savings alone would be a small fortune!"

"My husband!" a sob came in her voice. "You must not blame him; he is all that is good and true."

"Where is he?" asked the General, tersely. "Why does he let you go wandering about the world alone?"

And then she sobbed out her story; how that the man she loved had been too proud to bear with her when he learned the secret of her mother's life; how he had offered her a liberal portion of his riches; but his love and companionship never more.

"He must be mad!" said the General, passionately. "If your mother's story were known to all the land no one could reproach her. She was like the hero of Shakespeare's play 'stung to death by slanderous tongues.'"

Florence shook her head.

"You won't tell him," she pleaded. "If he found me out he might send his lawyer again to offer me money—and I couldn't take it. I think that it would kill me!"

"Tell him!"—an honest indignation sounded in the General's voice. "I'd scorn to speak to the man who deemed my sister Doris a disgrace, and left his wife to work for her bread!"

"She must never do that again!" said Mrs. Anstruther, taking Florence into her arms and kissing her. "She must be as our very own daughter now."

She ought to have been happy—loving, tender parents, a luxurious house offered her at one moment; but love is stronger than aught else. Even then her heart ached—ached for the sound of her husband's voice.

CHAPTER XVIII. AND LAST.

THE lodgings at Camden Town were deserted, Mrs. Ludd and Hillier lost their talented embroiderer. Brarley Park received a new inmate, and the household were publicly informed that the young lady known to them as Mrs. Warton was their master's niece and adopted daughter.

So Florence once more found herself the inmate of a luxurious home. The General and his wife lavished every care and tenderness on her love could dictate. To one she seemed the image of his beautiful young sister, while the other accepted her as the substitute for the little daughters who had faded beneath an Indian sky. The very day she came one point was settled—the sorrow of her life, the estrangement from her husband, was never to be touched upon. The General and his wife declared they would never even ask his name.

"If he could cast you from him for such a cause he must be heartless," said her uncle. "Isabel and I will take what care of you heart and love can, and you must try your best, my poor child, to forget the past."

"I shall never do that, Uncle Denis!" she answered, simply. "He is my husband, and I shall love him till I die."

"Ugh!"

"You would like him if you knew him; he is so brave and true."

The General shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear, I don't want to know him; I won't even hear his name. Our one object now must be to cheer you up and make you happy."

She did not tell him that for her happiness was over—that never while she lived would joy come to her heart again. She looked into his face and thanked him. She smiled when he told her his little stories of bygone days; she laughed

at his jests, and was grateful to him for his presents, and in a month he loved her almost as a daughter, and little suspected the true misery at her heart. His wife's eyes were keener—she, too, loved Florence; but she was a woman, and she could read the girl's feelings as though by instinct. She knew quite well that nothing in all the world—not even her baby's love—would comfort Florence for the loss of her husband's love.

"Dear," she said to her one bright October day, "we cannot make you happy; your uncle thinks you are contented, but I can see that you are like a bird in a cage—a little bird that beats its wings against the cage and longs for freedom."

"Don't say that, aunty. Indeed, indeed, I am not ungrateful; but sometimes I think the power of being happy has left me for ever."

"And you are not twenty!"

"No; only a year ago I was so happy. I think no girl in all the world was ever happier. Alan loved me so; he seemed to live only for me."

"Florence, do you think all reconciliation is impossible! Your uncle declares nothing can undo the past; he blames your husband, and says nothing in the world can excuse his conduct. But, my darling, you love him; you are just eating your heart away because you are separated from him."

Florence burst into tears.

"That's just it," she sobbed; "I can't bear to think I may live years and yet be no nearer him—that for all time we are apart—that no summer sun or winter frost will see us together."

"And he told you he could never love you again!"

She shook her head.

"We had been divided for months—a shadow seemed to have crept between us. I think the very knowledge of my secret made me unable to dispel it. Then one morning I heard that my mother was very ill, and I went to see her."

"And he discovered it!"

"I suppose so. I meant to tell him all that night; the concealment was more than I could bear."

"And you did not tell him?"

"I could not. He never came. As I expected him they put a letter in my hands. It was a cruel letter; he said he knew my secret, and he could never bear to see me again. His lawyer would call in the morning to make all arrangements for my comfort."

"Then he was a rich man?"

"I suppose so. I don't think I ever cared about that."

"But you lived comfortably—you had no hardships!"

"I had every luxury money could provide. Alan lavished things on me just as Uncle Denis does now. I want a great deal into society; I was hardly ever at home."

Mrs. Anstruther started.

"Then your husband was not in any business or profession?"

"Oh, no; he was a nobleman. I forgot you did not know his name. If my little child is a boy, he will be a viscount."

Mrs. Anstruther marvelled. She had had very hard thoughts of her nephew of marriage, but the news of his rank softened them. For an earl, whose name is in everyone's mouth, to have a scandal attaching to his mother-in-law must be very trying. It increased the difficulties of the position if Florence were indeed a countess; her child must be heir of a noble name. Was it right to leave the father in ignorance of its very truth?

Florence understood her.

"If I am dying," she whispered, "I trust to you to send for him. I couldn't die without his arms round me. If I were really dying he must forgive me."

There was a look on her face which seemed to say she would welcome death itself gladly for the sake of that forgiveness. Mrs. Anstruther kissed her fondly, and left the room.

One week later the child, whose advent Alan would have rejoiced over, lay in his cradle, the little heir for whom no father's embrace was ready.

"Ought we to let him know?" asked Mrs.

Anstruther, of her husband. "The hardest heart must relent towards Florence now; and surely he would be proud of the little heir!"

The General shook his head.

"It's my belief he's a bad lot, whoever he is," he said, firmly. "Send for him if the poor child wishes it, but it's my belief she won't."

And she did not.

Mrs. Anstruther herself put the question—put it with all a mother's tenderness.

"I don't want to be forgiven just for my boy's sake," whispered Florence. "If I get weaker, if there is any danger, then send for him, but, unless, I would rather not!"

So no tidings were sent to Alan. Florence recovered quickly, and the little child became the idol of the doting old couple, who lavished on him all the tenderness of their hearts. He was christened in the little village church, the General being his godfather, and he received the names of Alan Anstruther, Florence thinking a little sadly that the first was the only thing he would have of his father's.

Her husband's rank had not been communicated to the General. His wife understood him thoroughly, and as the one subject which incensed him was his niece's husband, she avoided it steadily.

The December days were fairly begun when the General came home from London in an unwonted excitement.

"You remember Alan Dale, Isabel?"

"The young *attaché* who saved your life at Constantinople seven years ago? I am not likely to forget him. Dears, I pray for him every morning."

"I met him to-day."

"And how is he? Is he making any stay in England? Is he coming to see us?"

"He looks well enough, but awfully altered—ten years older than he has any right to be. Fancy, Isabel, he has come into the family honour—he is Lord Eldale now, one of the richest peers in England."

"Is he married?"

"I don't know. I suppose not. I asked him to come here and spend a week. No, he can't be married or he would have offered to bring his wife."

Florence had not been present at this conversation. Her aunt went in search of her—she was sitting in her dressing-room with her baby in her arms.

"We are to have a visitor to-morrow, dear—a young man who was almost like our own son when we were at Constantinople. He saved your uncle's life."

"And he is coming to see you? How nice for you!"

"He is coming for a week. I thought, my darling, I had better warn you lest it should be anyone you had known in your married life. Mr. Dane has come to the family honour since we parted—he has become Lord Eldale."

Florence sprang to her feet with a gasping cry of surprise.

"Is it my husband?"

"Florence!"

"I told you he was good and true—that his harshness to me was his only fault. You will believe me now, aunt?"

Mrs. Anstruther wrung her hands.

"My dear, what am I to do! I wouldn't pain you for the world, but how can I put him off?"

"You mustn't put him off! I will dine upstairs while he is here, and stay a great deal in the nursery—we need never meet. Oh, aunt, it makes me happy only to think I shall be beneath the same roof as Alan!"

"If only he could see you," said Mrs. Anstruther; "if only you would meet him!"

Florence shook her head.

"It would only be pain for us both!"

"But—"

"Alan is not a man to change."

"Well, I can't help hoping you may meet, and things arrange themselves."

"Indeed, you must not hope it!"

"What shall I tell your uncle?"

"That Lord Eldale knows my husband, and I dare not risk a meeting with him."

The General shrugged his shoulders when this message reached him.

"That's the best thing I've heard of the fellow. Yet he can't be so very bad if he knows Alan Dale."

The months which had passed since the Earl's visit to Keston had been full of pain. Little by little hope had died out of his heart. In vain Cecil Fane and his winsome wife (from whom the truth could not long be kept) tried to cheer him. A fixed conviction took possession of his mind that he should never see his wife again.

And, oh, how he had loved her! Oh, how he loved her still! It seemed to him that day by day he missed her more; then when the anniversary of his wedding came round the wound was as keen and deep as when he first lost all clue to her.

He was not at all anxious to accept General Anstruther's invitation; but the old officer would take no denial, and there was something so hearty and genial in his manner that it cheered the lonely man in spite of himself.

"We are quite alone!" concluded the General. "No one but my niece and her little boy. I don't know if you are fond of children—he's a splendid fellow. I feel as if I was his grandfather."

Alan laughed; he really could not help it.

"I shall hope to make his acquaintance to-morrow, sir."

He certainly had no cause to complain of his reception. The General himself was waiting on the platform, and conducted him to the Park. Mrs. Anstruther and afternoon tea were waiting in the drawing-room (from which, by accident or design on the part of the lady of the house, the picture of Doris Warburton had been carefully removed).

Very warm was the greeting bestowed by Isabel Anstruther on the man who had saved her husband's life; warmer even than it would have been had she not listened to Florence's confidence. She received Alan to-night in a two-fold capacity—he was the General's preserver; but he was also the husband of Florence, and little Alan's father. Lord Eldale noticed the absence of the niece; but forbore to remark it.

"I daresay she's a motherly woman," he reflected to himself as he sat sipping his tea, "who spends all her leisure time in the nursery, and will come down to dinner presently dressed in hopelessly bad taste, and entertain us with baby-talk all the evening."

But he was disappointed when he returned to the drawing-room; the husband and wife were alone, and when they went down to dinner, he saw at a glance that the table was only laid for three.

"I thought you had a niece staying with you!" he said to his hostess.

"Yes, this is her home for the present. It is a great pleasure to us to have her."

"Shall I not see her?"

"I must ask you to excuse her. She is not very strong, and she leads a very retired life."

The servants had left them now, and dessert was on the table.

"I understand," said Alan, gravely; "she is a widow, and you are taking care of her and her little child."

Mrs. Anstruther answered nothing. Alan understood that the subject was a painful one, and introduced another.

But it was to be recurring to again that night. When the hostess had retired, and the two gentlemen were sitting over their wine, the General said, suddenly,—

"I wonder if you would do me a favour, Alan?"

The Earl never hesitated.

"I would only be too glad!"

"You must not think I asked you here for this purpose; until this morning I was quite ignorant that it laid in your power to oblige me."

"I can only repeat, sir, that any favour I can do for you will be one to myself."

The General played with his wine-glass.

"You heard what my wife said just now about our niece?"

"Yes."

"And you imagined she was a widow?"

"I certainly gathered so."

"You were mistaken. Her husband is alive, only he happens to be a heartless wretch—he has deserted that poor child. Well," wiping his spectacles, "I call it a good riddance; but she doesn't happen to think so. Now I am a rich man, and that girl and her child is all I have. Don't you think if the husband learned that his wife was my sole heiress he would return to her?"

"He might; but I doubt if it would be for her happiness."

"That is what I want you to tell me. He is an intimate friend of yours—the poor girl told my wife so last night; she said she could not bear to meet you because it would recall the days when she saw you in her husband's house. Now I want you to tell me which is best—to let this fellow alone, or to try and touch his heart?"

"I think you are mistaken, General. I am quite sure I have no friend who has deserted his wife. I have very few intimate friends. What is his name?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You cannot tell it me?"

"I wouldn't hear it. I know his first name is Alan; because nothing would please Floy but that the boy should be christened so."

Lord Eldale started up, a strange light in his dark eyes. He hardly knew what he was about, only a hope had come to him so new, so wonderful, it made him another man.

"Let me see her!" he cried.

"See her! I have just told you she can't bear it. You would remind her of her husband."

Alan put one hand on the old man's shoulder.

"General Anstruther, I lost my wife seven months ago through a cruel mistake. I have sought her madly, frantically, since, as man do seek what they hold dearest in this world. Her name was Florence. Now do you understand what wild hopes your words have raised in me?"

"But it can't be—"

"Let me see her."

As in a dream he followed the General upstairs. The old man pointed silently to a door, and went away. Alan pushed it open and went in.

A girl sat by the fire reading, with her bright brown hair floating round her like a golden cloud.

"Florence!"

She looks up. It is Alan's voice, but there is no coldness, no anger in it; it has all its old ring of passionate tenderness, his eyes are full of love.

"My darling," he murmured, "do you know I have been seeking you for months?"

She answers nothing, words will not come.

"I was a fool, an idiot!" he murmurs. "I thought you loved Cecil."

"You thought that?"

"Ay; it drove me nearly mad. I learned the truth at last. I heard from my cousin the secret you kept back from me; I went to Caroline-street to find you. I never loved you better, dear, than then!"

His arms are round her, her fair head has found its true home again upon his shoulder but she does not speak. Perhaps she fears that words will break the spell, and waken her from this dream of bliss to life's cruel realities.

"You will come back to me, my darling!" he cries. "You loved me once; my harshness can't quite have killed your love!"

And then she finds her voice.

"I shall love you till I die!"

The next season London was again graced by the fair presence of Lady Eldale. No one ever heard the true reason for her abrupt disappearance the previous spring; but everyone declares with one voice that she is lovelier than ever.

Those who gaze deeper say that she is happier, too. Many voices pronounce her and her cousin, Mrs. Cecil Fane, the most charming and contented of matrons. It may be so; but Florence's marriage has memories Paddy's will never know—nothing will ever quite blot out the

recollection of the loneliness which preceded her boy's birth. But that recollection has no sadness for her now; she knows that Alan loves her just as he did when he asked her to be his—she knows that no shadow of her mother's story has ever troubled him; that society considers him fortunate to have won General Anstruther's heiress; but the crown came to her happiness one cold winter's day, when she held her second child in her arms, and it was a little daughter.

"Shall we call her Isabel, after my aunt, or Emily, after yours?" she asked Alan.

"Neither," he answered, with a strange smile upon his face. "Darling, we will name our little treasure Doris!"

She answered him by a bright look of love, and as he bent to kiss her a sweet content filled her heart—she knew that for all time her husband had forgiven Her Great Mistake.

[THE END.]

SUNBEAM.

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(Continued from page 609.)

"Charity!" he had repeated, scarcely believing he heard aright. "Do you taunt us already because we are poor and friendless? Is not our bitter lot enough to bear without this last crowning indignity?"

"What do you mean by charity, Sir William?" put in Rennie, her blue eyes turning purple with anger. "Is the bread we are eating, and the roof which sheltered our poor mother from her cradle, to be henceforth a place where malice and hatred usurp the love and trustfulness of a sweet, dead past? Rather than submit to your insults and tyranny I would become one of the veriest kitchen drudges! My spirit you shall never tame!" and her tiny, firm mouth quivered with emotion.

"I have no fancy for shrews, young or old!" he said, quietly, a dark scowl of wrath in his countenance at being defied by both nephew and niece. "Go to your room, and do not presume to appear at dinner, or in fact any meal, until you both make me an apology for your unwarrantable impudence!"

"I would die rather!" Rennie muttered, fiercely, as she linked her arm in Jack's and left his presence, with head erect, and a mien as unyielding and haughty as his own.

Once alone by themselves Jack bowed his head to his hands, and gave himself up to bitter despair.

"We have been rash—perfect idiots—to vex Sir William!" he faltered. "I wish my tongue had been cut out! Our lives will be a perpetual misery! I would not care for myself; a piece of bread and a cup of water and a dungeon is as good for me as a palace!" (this hopelessly). "It is for your sake I grieve."

"Then cease worrying about me," she rejoined, animatedly, all trace of sadness gone from her face. "I mean to be brave, and earn my own living."

"You are silly!" he said, petulantly. "Why, what could you do?"

"Lots of things, if I make up my mind. Become a nurse to the sick."

"What!" he exclaimed, aghast at her words; "you, who have been the petted darling and undisputed mistress of Glenhorn! It's perfectly ridiculous!"

"Ridiculous or not, I mean to have a try for it, Mr. Job's comforter!" she said, cheerily. "First of all I shall get dear old nurse to give you a home with her in her tiny new thatched cottage, and send you the third of my colossal salary."

"I wish you wouldn't talk twaddle!" he growled, huffily. "Why, you must be crazed—demented! Fancy a pretty girl like you being stifled up in a sick room, all smells and nastiness! Ugh! It's horrible!"

"What a picture you draw of one of the noblest duties which can fall to the lot of woman!"

You silly boy, look at that dear creature, Miss Nightingale, and our own Princess Alice. Surely I am no better than they in your estimation!"

"They didn't do it for bread," he retorted, somewhat sheepishly.

"Then that only strengthens my case, for it was pure love for the vocation, not lucre, that influenced those noble women to become ministering angels."

"Oh! you always have a knack of arguing with me till I haven't a word at my command," he grumbled, not convinced in spite of her defence.

"That shows I am right then; but I mustn't waste precious time. I have an advertisement to answer, which I fancy will just suit me."

When her letter was finished she gave a little sigh of relief, and went over to Jack and gave him a tender kiss.

"Don't be grumpy," she said, merrily. "If I don't like the life I can easily try something else you know, Jack."

The following day she had an answer from a Nursing Institute, asking her to call at her earliest opportunity.

A letter was despatched to Locksley to meet her at the terminus.

"You must take Winter with you," Jack said, anxiously, for the idea of his sweet, winsome sister rambling about the dangerous roads of the great city filled him with alarm.

"Oh, yes, she is coming with me," she answered, cheerily, trying to chase away his fears by assuming a brave spirit; though, in her heart of hearts, she felt terribly despondent at her prospects.

The only bright gleam in her horizon was the thought of seeing Locksley, to bask for a brief while in his dear presence and society.

That evening Geraldine Lyth swept into Rennie's boudoir, after giving a peremptory knock, and threw herself on Rennie's rose-coloured silk couch with an air of proprietorship that amazed her.

"I have decided to make this my boudoir. I like the view better than the one I am using," she observed, coolly. "When can you let me have it?"

"When you please, Miss Lyth," she answered frigidly. "The piano is all I wish to remove."

"The piano!" Geraldine exclaimed. "It would spoil the tone of the room; it is en suite. That I cannot permit."

"Why?" Rennie asked, resentfully. "Do you wish to deprive me of a gift, the only one I can say I possess, made by my grandfather on my coming home from school?"

"I shall not permit you to remove furniture from my house, Rennie Allison."

"You shall not rob me of that," she retorted, defiantly. "I yield up to you everything else, but I dare you to stop its removal."

"You talk like some vixen instead of a gentlewoman," she sneered. "You permit your tongue too much freedom of speech."

"I say what I mean, and mean what I say," Rennie returned, hotly. "I am no hypocrite."

"A shrewish girl is detestable to all right-minded people's opinion," she retorted, spitefully.

"Have you tried to soften my nature. Have you not repulsed all my advances with cruel cutting contempt, till I could endure it no longer?"

"You should join the dramatic profession. You undoubtedly would draw the public, but even an actress drops her stage manners in private, and becomes the lady in repose of language and deportment. Try and take the hint," this feily.

The irony and scorn in Geraldine's tone cut poor Rennie to the quick, for she felt she was no match for this contemptuous haughty woman.

"I must decline to continue this cruel interview, Miss Lyth," she replied, putting a powerful curb on her tongue. "If we were to talk for years I can see it would not make us better friends; and as I shall soon be away from here for ever, the less I say to wound you the easier will be my conscience in the future; but understand me, the piano leaves with me."

There was such a firm calm expression on that rosy month and in those deep blue eyes that Miss Lyth felt unable to cope with her any longer; so she rose, shook out her dress, and left the room, feeling she had not triumphed over that little vixen Rennie, for that was the title she gave her.

"Papa," she observed, later on, "is it not great impudence of Rennie Allison to say she is going to remove the piano out of her boudoir. Will you permit this outrage?"

"What reason does she assign for such unseemly conduct?" he asked gravely.

"She says she is going away, and that grandpa gave her the piano."

"Then, my dear, we had best let her take it. She is so spiteful that a scence would be the result if we opposed her. Where does she say she is going?"

"To earn her living, so she says," she rejoined tartly, annoyed at being thwarted in preventing Rennie from gaining her object.

"They could have remained here if they had behaved themselves. I have not driven them away," he muttered half aloud, trying to justify his harshness to the orphan.

"Speaking candidly, I am glad they are going, papa, for then I can settle down with content, and rearrange the furniture, and plan out the alterations. It is a gruesome place as it is; that tapestry, too, in the dining-room is so heavy and dull. I want a pale green paper enriched with plenty of gold for the walls, and the picture-frames regilt. Everything looks so ancient."

He looked at the handsome, defiant beauty with a proud smile, as he thought never had there reigned a fairer or more imperious mistress than his own stately daughter, and returned, affectionately,—

"Whatever you wish, Geraldine, shall be done. I have no one to consider but you; next season you must be presented at Court. You will be one of the belles, if I am not mistaken."

"I shall endeavour to do credit to our name I promise you, papa," her eyes lighting up at the prospect of her future triumphs.

CHAPTER V.

"You have come, Locksley!" Rennie said, joyously, as he stepped up to the carriage, and assisted her and Winter to alight.

"Do you think I could have denied myself the happiness of looking once more on one so dear to me," he whispered, ardently, leading them both into the hotel, where he had ordered a tempting lunch to be in readiness for his guests.

He felt deeply concerned when he saw the ravages her trials had made in that sweet, saucy face, and of course attributed it to fretting over her bereavement, for she had not even hinted in her letters at the domestic unhappiness she was enduring.

"How kind you are to think of us!" Rennie remarked, with a smile, the first one that had illumined her sad, young face since the death of her grandfather.

Over the repeat they laughed and chatted as merry as kittens, forgetful for the moment of all care and sorrow.

But alas! the dread time crept on, when the altered state of her affairs must be confessed when Locksley commenced,—

"To what lucky star do I owe this more than pleasure! Shopping, or what?"

"I forgot all when I met you," she said, with a sigh; "it was all so like old times, you know. The fact is, I—I am now only a dependent on my uncle, and it galls me, so I have come to town to get my own living."

"You!" he exclaimed, astounded at her words.

"Is too true; Jack and I are beggars. It seems the will grandpa made is lost. At all events, it cannot be found. Mr. Dyson's theory is that he destroyed it, intending to make another, and died before he could do so."

"This is terrible, but in Heaven's name what do you intend to do?" he said, gravely, all the light fading from his face at the thought of his

darling battling with the world alone with her dainty beauty and innocence.

"I have answered an advertisement for—for a nurse's place at an institution in Covent Garden. They are going to teach me my duties. Of all positions I prefer this. It is so comforting, you know, to be of service to your fellow-creatures, to soothe and heal their sufferings; it takes you out of yourself, and that is what I am craving for—forgetfulness!"

"Give up this crazy, sunbeam, and link your fate to mine!" he pleaded, excitedly.

"You forget Jack. He is my sole care now," she interposed, firmly. "He must never help to drag you down now that your foot is gradually ascending the ladder. No, no, Locksley; we must be patient. Everything comes to those who wait!"

"Sometimes death!" he put in, bitterly.

"Even that may be a blessing in disguise to many a weary heart," she returned.

Before he said good-bye he tried every argument he was capable of to alter her determination, but she was firm in her resolve to go forth into the stern, hard world as a bread-winner, brave as a young squire always is who has never known its buffets or cruel indifference.

True to her word, she made her way to the institute, and won upon the matron the moment she looked into the sweet, innocent face of the girl; and in a few days she found herself garbed in a neat brown gown, with a snowy apron and cap, learning how to bandage wounds and dress them in a professional way, to fit her for hospital duty; and a most adept pupil she became, winning golden opinions from the matron and the doctors.

Her letters to Jack were bright, hopeful ones, so also were those she posted weekly to Locksley, detailing her happiness in her mission, as she styled it.

Months flew by, and still Rennie wrote bright, encouraging letters. One contained news that sent Locksley's pulses beating with pleasure, for it told him news which gave him hope.

"At last I have found a great oculist," it ran on, "who has promised to see Jack. His fee is fifty guineas for an operation, but he has actually consented to forego it. Did you ever hear of such generosity? I am in the seventh heaven of delight, because he cured a little girl who had a sudden blight, just like Jack's! Oh, Locksley! my joy and gratitude know no bounds in finding such a friend!"

"Heaven be praised!" he exclaimed, fervently kissing the letter with a lover's fond rhapsody.

"If Jack's sight should be restored my darling will be mine, and Jack shall become a solicitor, and find me in briefs!" and he plunged his elbows on his knees, and gave himself up to delicious dreams of future bliss, where the preening fairy was a sweet, winsome girl-woman, with tender blue eyes, and a rosy mouth, which whispered, "Dearest husband!" ever so softly, and then the delightful music of tinsy, pattering feet fell upon his ear, and baby voices cooed paps, and held out soft, dimpled arms to him; then the curly head drooped lower, and he passed into real dreamland, with his treasured letter clasped in his hand.

(To be concluded.)

A FEROCEOUS little fighter is the male stickle-back. Anything that comes near him—big or little—he flies at, and generally drives away by sheer pluck. An Eastern variety of our stickle-back, is known as the betta pugnax—the fighting bitta—from his pugilistic propensities. The people of Cochín China and Siam keep specimens of this little fish in glass globes, and match them, just as the Mexican does his gamecocks. These fish fight until one or the other is dead, and quantities of money change hands over the results. Siamese and Chinese employ in similar fashion crickets, in which a very big trade is done. Queer as it may seem, these insects are regularly trained for fighting. They are kept in wooden cages, and fed on special food. The fish has spread to Mexico, where the insects are fed on cactus-juice, which makes them very savage.

THE HEIRESS OF BEAUDESERT.

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CHAPTER XLII.—(continued.)

IF Flossie Springold had found Lady Valerie still absent she had promised herself the pleasure of informing Rex Verreker of her present whereabouts; but now that her light eyes took in the scene before them, and she saw Valerie established by the fire, with Rex himself seated close by her side, and ready to guard her from all annoyance, she wished herself back again at Scarsdale, with all her heart. By the slow way in which he rose from the chair she knew she was not welcome, and that added to the anger she already felt for the innocent girl who had won him from her. With a smile she came forward.

"Papa is downstairs, and I just looked in to see if you were safe," taking the chair which Rex offered her as soon as the first greetings were over. "I missed you when we were close to Ivora Keep, and I thought you might have had some difficulty in getting home."

The colour stole into Lady Valerie's cheeks, for she knew with what intonation this apparently innocent speech was made; but she answered quietly, as she poured out a cup of tea for her, "I did not know the way, never having been there before, but I was fortunate enough to meet Lord Daintree."

"Ah! perhaps he was as much alarmed as I was."

"Are there any wild bears in this forest of yours?" asked the young Countess, demurely.

"No, I was not thinking of wild beasts. I shouldn't have been afraid if I had been quite alone, but for Lady Valerie it was different."

"Yes, she was nearer home, so it mattered less," put in Verreker, in his most decided manner.

Flossie, burning with indignation, longed to be revenged. "Ivora Keep can't be called near to either of us, but Lady Valerie probably knows it better than I do."

"She said that she had never been there before."

"Well, then, she knows its master better than I do, so it comes to the same thing."

"Not quite. Lady Valerie might have met Colonel Darrell in her own house, but that would not have helped her to find the way from his."

"Not if she had gone in, and asked him!" with a scornful smile, which she could not control.

"But she did not go in, so the position is just the same!" persisted Rex.

"Didn't you ask Colonel Darrell the way?" turning to Valerie.

The blood rushed into her face, and a gleam of triumph shot from Flossie's eyes. "I did ask Colonel Darrell, but it was Lord Daintree who showed it me."

"Yes, and I would trust the Marquis long before this man who is always up in the clouds," observed Maria. "You seem so much interested in him, Miss Springold. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Oh, dear, no. I never spoke to him in my life. There are such queer stories about him when he was in Italy that I keep clear of him by my father's orders. Also I have other reasons for hating him," with a glance at Valerie.

"So have I," said Rex Verreker, seeing her drift, and pretending to mistake it; "the master of Zibedee Sleeman has small claims on my gratitude."

"Oh! that dreadful man with the white cat!" exclaimed the Countess, with a shudder. "I hope he won't follow him over here."

"How about the ball to-morrow? I hope a good many of you are going," said Flossie, changing her ground; "it makes it so much pleasanter to have plenty of friends."

"We are going to do our duty thoroughly," and Lady Valerie smiled, as she thought of the body-guard whom she was to bring with her. "I expect we shall want every one of the carriages down to the dog-cart itself."

"Are you going?" with an emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"I should rather think she was," broke in Rex, impetuously. "Do you think there is one of us who would consent to go without her? I am sure the Countess wouldn't."

"Not I. If Valerie stayed at home, so would I—and you—and the Marquis. As to the rest I can't tell, for I haven't seen them."

"Who are the rest?" asked Flossie, trying not to feel utterly crushed.

"I really can scarcely remember," and Valerie began to count on her fingers. "The Duchesse of Agincourt, Lord Westraven and his bride, Mr. Portal, and his sister Lady Jane—(she is said to be so proper that she won't speak to a bachelor unless her mother is standing by, so I don't know how she will amuse herself)—a few others—chiefly officers—oh, and the young Duke of Cowes, who has forgotten how many thousands he has a year."

"I hope there are enough," trying to recover her spirits, though how could she hope to see Lady Valerie snubbed, when she came to the ball backed by half the peerage?

Lord Daintree came into the room, looked most unmistakably disgusted to see Miss Springold, shook hands as if the touch of her fingers gave him a chill, and sitting down by the Countess, kept up a conversation with her in a confidential undertone. Flossie looked from one to the other, and bit her lip. If she had ever doubted Verreker's love for Lady Valerie she could not do so any longer. It was shining so clearly in his eyes as he watched her every movement; and the Marquis seemed to be devoted to this stranger, who appeared to have been imported especially to add to her discomfort. No one wanted her, so she took herself off, her heart brimming over with malice.

Rex Verreker, at a sign from Lady Valerie, politely escorted the little beauty downstairs.

"I think you must be blind," she said bitterly, when they reached the hall.

He opened his eyes. "Why? I didn't stumble on the stairs."

She stamped her foot in fierce impatience. "You know what I mean—Valerie is playing with you. She receives clandestine letters from Colonel Darrell."

"She can't help their coming; but I wouldn't have taken a man into my service who picked one up and tried to trade upon its contents." He looked her straight in the face, saw the quick blush of shame dye her cheeks, and turning on his heel, went to the library to tell Colonel Scarsdale that his daughter was waiting for him.

With her teeth set, and her heart sunk down into her boots, Flossie Springold stood silent, pale, and desperate on the door-mat. But she was not to be beaten like this.

The next morning she drove over to Belton, on pretence of asking for some flowers. Lady Daintree was in the morning-room writing letters.

They talked of the ball that evening, and Flossie, after alluding to her son's long stay at Beaudesert, which she knew was annoying to her, asked if the Marchioness still meant to turn the cold shoulder on Lady Valerie.

"Certainly, my dear," with acridulated decision. "I never mean to countenance vice, however high it may stand."

"I'm afraid Lord Daintree won't approve!"

"Do you think I'm to be governed by my son? I don't mean to speak a word to her, and half the ladies in the neighbourhood intend to follow my lead!"

Flossie went home not a little comforted.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE HUNT BALL.

THE hunt ball had never been so numerously attended as on the evening of the 24th of December, the year 189—. Carriage after carriage rolled down the streets of Warchester to the doors of the Royal Stag, and the crowds outside on the cold pavement were never tired of gazing at all the fine birds in fine feathers who passed

in at the wide open door. I don't know why it is the rule that the best people always come last; but, anyhow, on this occasion, some trifling delay occurred in the arrival of the party from Beaudesert. Flosie Springold was there, and in a fever of anxiety when the Marchioness of Daintree, in black velvet and emeralds, looking stiffer and prouder than ever, sailed into the well-lighted room, and after greeting some of her friends, came up to the spot where the little coquette was standing. Flosie's card was already half full, but her content was clouded, for the best names were absent. Only last year how many dances she would have been asked to reserve for Rex Verreker!

"They have not come yet!" said the Marchioness, inquiringly.

"Not yet, of course. Valerie would think it beneath her dignity to arrive at the same time as the rest."

"I have no patience with her, dragging my son about in her train, as if he hadn't something better to do than waste his time covering up her mistakes; but I shan't speak to her!" settling her lips in a hard, straight line. "I've quite made up my mind to that."

"I shall have to," said Flosie, apologetically; "but then, you see, my father continues to visit there, so I can't give it up!"

The Marchioness, who owed Valerie a special grudge because she was a cause of strife between herself and her son, smiled grimly.

"Men are all alike. An angel from Heaven couldn't convince him that there was any harm in a pretty face."

"I wonder when we are going to begin!" addressing her future partner, who had a large moustache which swallowed up half his face.

"Waiting for the Beaudesert people—great shame, but Willington is spoons on Lady Valerie. Here they come! By George! she does look splendid!"

Every eye was turned towards the door through which slowly defiled a gorgeous company. The Earl and the Duchess of Agincourt came first, the latter radiant in diamonds; the bride in wedding finery came next, with Lord Westraven by her side; Marie de Ruivigny followed close on her heels, whispering some mischievous remark to the Marquis de Daintree; then Lady Jane Portal; but beyond, last and loveliest of all the ladies, was Valerie de Montfort. She held her head erect, with unconscious dignity, but a sweet smile curved her lips as she answered some chaffy remark of the Duke of Cowes. Nobody could have guessed the latent anxiety in her heart, or why it was that Rex Verreker broke through the little knot of officers in the rear, in order to see her first entry into the ballroom. There was no doubt as to the reception of the Earl of Beaudesert's daughter as she made her way slowly to the Duchess's side. And instead of the promised cold shoulder there seemed to be a race between the women to see which should have the honour of shaking hands with her first! Even the Marchioness of Daintree felt her resolution ebbing out of the tips of her white gloves as she saw the Duchess of Agincourt treating the girl whom she wanted to snub as if she were a bosom friend.

Isabella, the Duchess, was of higher rank, and knew the world better than most. Her opinion was taken as law on social subjects; and Lady Daintree saw, as one neighbour after another pressed round the Beaudesert party, that she must get up quickly and do the same, unless she wanted to be left out in the cold.

"We must have made a mistake," she said, hurriedly, to her usual confidant; but Flosie was already amongst the besieging crowd. "Thank goodness, there is still time to rectify it!"

With unusual haste she went across the room, and said, in a loud voice, which nervousness put beyond her control, "So glad to see you once more amongst us, Valerie! I was afraid you might have tired yourself out hunting."

"Would you have been very much disappointed?" and there was a twinkle of mischief in the dark eyes which made her feel decidedly uncomfortable.

"How d'ye do, Marie," said the Duchess,

stretching out a plump hand and an arm covered with diamond bangles. "I've fallen in love with your son. Why didn't you grow him a little earlier!"

"My dear Isabella, how you talk!" with smiling disapproval.

"Lucky for him, for now he's free, and I wouldn't lose any time, if I were he!" with a laughing glance after Lady Valerie's receding form. "You never told me how bewitching she was; I should be crazy if I were a man!"

"She is not my style," said the Marchioness, coldly, not having yet recovered her temper over her shattered resolutions.

"Then I should alter it at once, for it must be wrong. Dear me, if I were a man, I should get a special license the first thing to-morrow morning, and marry her straight off without asking her whether she would or no."

"Rather presumptuous!" said a voice behind her.

"Oh, Colonel Darrell!" she exclaimed with pleasure, as she turned round quickly. "I haven't seen you for ages. Come and amuse me, as you always do. What is your latest piece of wickedness?"

"Coveting my neighbour's goods," he answered, with a smile. "Your diamonds are too dazzling."

"You humiliate me. That used to be said of my eyes."

The hunt ball had never been such a success before. The grand people from London gave themselves no airs, except, perhaps, Lady Jane, the length of whose neck made her look down upon her neighbours. But when she had found a tall dragon, the top of whose head she could not possibly see, she was content to look up at least every now and then to the level of his eyes.

Flosie Springold was supposed to be enjoying herself because she danced every dance; but there was a wild longing in her eyes as they followed Rex Verreker about the room; and she sighed heavily in between her bursts of silvery laughter. She was in a mood ripe for any mischief that might offer, and fate decreed that she was to find her opportunity before the night was over. She made a dead set at the Duke of Cowes, but the Marquis warned him off, and he never came back for a second waltz, as he had said he would. Lady Valerie told him that he was very unkind and interfering, but he defended himself warmly, saying that the youngster hadn't a chance with a sneak and a viper; and then she walked away on Rex Verreker's arm, and straightway forgot everything else in the enchantment of the hour.

They passed under an archway of greenery into a small room consecrated of set purpose to flirtations, where the lamps did not give too brilliant a light, and where the scent of tuberose and gardenias from the conservatories of the neighbourhood suggested the innocence of passion. Flosie's jealous eyes followed them, knowing what this hurried retreat meant in the midst of a favourite waltz.

Her brain was in a whirl; she felt as if she must do something to prevent it, or go mad. Her eyes shone with excitement, her cheeks glowed, her breath came in short gasps. Never before had she looked half so beautiful, but now her beauty seemed to have borrowed a charm from the evil one himself. Drawn perhaps towards her by a kindred spirit, Colonel Darrell stood before her.

"Miss Springold," he said, in his most deferential manner, "I have no need surely to ask for an introduction, for we have met before."

"I have not forgotten," she said in a low voice, her heart throbbing painfully. There was temptation in his dark eyes, and she knew it, as she placed her hand in his offered arm, but what form the temptation would take she could not guess.

He led her away out of the crowd, as if he knew she had no wish to dance, and brought her to a sofa in a retired corner.

She looked wondrously fair with that flush on her cheeks, and the light playing on her yellow hair; and boding over her with an air of devo-

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To flowers, rain is the drink of drinks. You may deluge them with barrels of water from the hydrant and they will, at best simply hold their own. Generally they wither in the long, dry seasons, and that without regard to the artificial watering they may receive from the gardeners. But let a shower, however brief, fall upon them and they brighten visibly. The difference is that the rain brings down with it through the air, or collects in the air, a chemical quality that the vegetation needs. The rainwater may be like that in the lake as two volumes of water can be. But when it has risen the upper levels of the atmosphere, when it has travelled through the various stages of vapour and liquid, and has tumbled down through that rest of the air, it has become charged with elements that no man can give it.

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"Rex Verreker must be mad," he breathed in an undertone, after a long pause.

She looked up startled.

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"Who dares to say so?" her eyes flashing.

"Your eyes betrayed your secret. But don't be afraid. I am the soul of honour, and if you will give me your aid he shall return to his allegiance, when you may spurn him or not as you please." The idea of spurning him was put in to save her pride.

"Aid you in what?" she asked, in a low voice.

"If the statue falls into the hands of another, Verreker will be rather sold."

"There must be nothing to compromise me," she said, nervously.

"Nothing, on the word of a gentleman," he said, earnestly.

Flustered hesitated, but at that moment Rex Verreker and Lady Valerie passed down the room, looking shy, but radiant.

Her evil genius prompted her, and she said, in a low voice,—

"You may count on me," not knowing till she saw the gleam in Darrell's eyes how far or to what she had pledged herself.

(To be continued.)

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MR. PROSPECT HITES: "Have you seen those noiseless baby-carriages yet?" Mr. Greenwood Graves: "No! What I want is a noiseless baby."

"WHY did I ever marry!" she sighed, with the drops of bitterness in her words. "Because I asked you," he responded, with a sardonic smile.

OLD GENTLEMAN: "Don't you think you've been coming to see my daughter long enough?" Young Man: "Too long, I fear, sir. Why, she wants to marry me!"

"USE one teaspoonful of this cocoa in hot water every day. This can will last thirty days." "But suppose there's company, friends!" "Then, of course, use more hot water."

HE: "What did you discuss at the meeting of your literary club this afternoon, my dear?" SHE: "The outrageous action of Miss Burgess in almost doubling her price for making a gown."

MRS. SCREECHER, at the piano, is vocally re-iterating: "What are the wild waves saying!" Tom (gloomily): "It's no use. She never can find out." Janet: "Why not?" Tom: "She can't reach the high C."

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"I HEARD you were on 'strike,'" said Mike to his friend Pat. "I was that," answered Pat. "A strike for what, Pat?" "For shorter hours, Mike!" "An' did you get them?" "Sure we did, Mike. It's not working at all I am now!"

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SOCIETY.

It is said that the Hereditary Grand Duke of Russia is likely to be a sutor for the hand of Princess Margaret of Connaught when she appears in the grown-up world.

The Duke and Duchess of York are now staying at Sandringham, it being their intention to return to town for the season at the beginning of May.

The Prince of Wales will give a fillip to the season by opening the Military Tournament on Friday, May 18th; and no doubt the public, filled as they are with military ardour and patriotic sentiment, will flock to Islington as usual. But the really exciting tournament will be that of 1901, in which, no doubt, many of the heroes of the South African War will be seen. Their reception should be something to remember.

The German Crown Prince Frederick will be eighteen on the 6th of May. His Imperial and Royal Highness will be eligible for an Honorary Knighthood of the Garter, which, the Queen will, it is said, bestow upon him, and personally invest him. The Crown Prince has passed his final examination at Ploen, and will now start life at Potsdam as an independent prince with his own establishment. It is said that his parents would be glad if he could find an English wife.

The Shah of Persia will arrive in London during the first week of July, and he is to be treated as a State guest, and will be lodged in Buckingham Palace. The Shah will probably visit the Queen both at Windsor Castle and at Osborne. No arrangements can be made for some time to come as to the Shah's movements during his stay in this country, but it is proposed that after leaving London he should visit Oxford, Portsmouth, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, York, and Leeds, and he will probably be entertained at some important country seats in England and Scotland, as was managed, after considerable diplomacy, for his predecessor in 1889.

So little has the German Empress to do with the household management of the Palace at Potsdam that it is the Emperor, and not his consort, who actually receives every morning the official whose duty it is to supervise every detail connected with the catering and general house-keeping arrangements. Although everything is done with due magnificence, the Emperor and Empress do not give the simplest dinner-party without the cost being carefully reckoned out beforehand at so much per head, and this sum will vary from as little as ten shillings to as much as five pounds, according to the number who are to be catered for, and the quality of the food with which they are to be served.

To visit in Royal palaces is not an unmixed pleasure; there is etiquette and stiffness to be reckoned with, and abroad, at least, there is the momentous question of tips. The Russian Court is the most expensive in the world. Here a week's sojourn costs about a hundred pounds in tips. Not only the coachman and footman, but crowds of officials and hangers-on in the palace must be presented with gifts. At the German Courts simplicity reigns. The King of Wurtemberg lives in the summer at Friedrichshafen, on the Lake of Constance, a truly Arcadian life. His guests are treated with charming courtesy and kindness. At the early dinner-hour of one o'clock a frock-coat is indispensable, but evening dress is never worn, and supper takes place at eight o'clock *à la carte*. The King is an ardent bicyclist, and goes out as early as five o'clock in the morning on his cycle. The rigidity of etiquette in German Courts has been much modified of late years. Visitors to Darmstadt may remember how, in the days of Princess Alice, ladies had to appear in low dresses at seven o'clock in the day, and the whole town was plunged in tranquillity and sleep before eleven at night.

STATISTICS.

A TON of dirty rags is worth about £10 to a rag-dealer.

A CARRIER-PIGION, flying with a strong wind, covers 1,600 yards per minute.

FROM two to three tons of stamps are despatched daily from Somerset House.

GEMS.

Few of us gain by the mistakes of others, but he who fails to profit by his own mistakes will soon be bankrupt in knowledge.

TRUTH poetry is truer than science, because it is synthetic, and seeks at once what the combination of all the sciences is able at most to attain as a final result. The soul of nature is divined by the poet; the man of science only serves to accumulate materials for its demonstration.

TIME can be truly saved only when it is well spent, and only well spent when we are in the right place, developing those faculties in which we most excel, and thus raising ourselves in value as the years go by. What we do will always correspond with what we are, and the thorough cultivation of health and welfare in their best sense is as necessary to the excellence and success of our labours as it is to our personal happiness.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

INDIAN SAVOURY.—Take some finely mashed potato, mix with it some finely chopped boiled onions and chopped capsaucins, a little dissolved butter, pepper and salt to taste. Mix into a paste with the yolk of an egg, press into fancy shapes, sprinkle with grated cheese, brown in the oven, and serve hot.

FRIAR'S OMELETTE.—Ingredients: Twelve apples, 4 ozs. butter, 4 ozs. sifted sugar, and four eggs. Boil the apples as for sauce, add the butter and sifted sugar, and when cold add the eggs, which must be well beaten. Cover the bottom of a baking-dish with crumbs of bread; then put in the apple mixture, finish with a layer of bread-crumbs, and when baked turn out the pudding and sift loaf-sugar over the top.

SCRAP CAKE.—A pound of flour, three-quarters of a pound of sugar, quarter of a pound of scrap (left from rendered down fat, the pieces left after the hot fat has been strained), a tablespoonful of ground ginger, a tablespoonful of cinnamon, and a dessertspoonful of baking-powder. Mix all these ingredients, moisten to a stiff dough with lukewarm water, roll out, and cut into small cakes. Bake in a quick oven. The cinnamon may be omitted.

APPLE SOUFFLE.—Ingredients: One pint of apple purée, one lemon, three eggs, one ounce of butter, one round sponge-cake, castor sugar, apricot jam, a few pitted-almonds, one glass of sherry. Cut the apples in quarters, and without peeling or coring them, stew them till soft with the pared lemon-rind and enough water to keep them from burning. When soft, rub all through a fine wire sieve. Stir in the raw yolks of two eggs only, and put the whites aside. Add the butter and sugar to taste. Cook this mixture for a minute or two over the fire, but do not let it boil. Take the cake, and carefully hollow out the centre, so as to leave a case. Sprinkle it over inside with the wine, and, after slightly warming the jam, spread it thinly over the outside, and sprinkle with chopped pitted-almonds. Beat the three whites to a stiff froth, and add them lightly to the apple mixture. Put this into the cake border, and place in a quick oven till well puffed up—probably about ten or fifteen minutes. Dust with sugar and serve immediately.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TOBACCO is one of the products of Southern Rhodesia.

A LIFEBOAT made of pumice-stone has been tested. It continued afloat with a load even when full of water.

THERE are two hospitals for lepers in the United States, one in New Orleans and one in San Francisco. Each contains about thirty-five patients.

THE largest and oldest chain bridge in the world is said to be that of Kingtung, in China, where it forms a perfect road from the top of one mountain to another.

THE largest crater in the world is in the Sandwich Islands. The circumference of the crater is about twenty miles, its depth in places being 2,000ft.

THE Swedish bride fills her pocket with bread, which she dispenses to everyone she meets on her way to church, every piece she disposes of averting, as she believes, a misfortune.

MORE than 200 kinds of extinct life, including insects, reptiles, plants, shells, fruits, &c., have been found in amber. In one collection, which is valued at £100,000, is a perfect lizard, eight inches long.

JAPAN is going to send to the Paris Exhibition a large house, hexagonal in shape, and composed entirely of porcelain. It measures several yards in circumference, and its weight will not be less than 70 tons.

THE ordinary outdoor hat in Corea is a curious looking thing, having a brim a foot and a half wide, and being made of a kind of stiff gossamer, of silk or horsehair, dexterously worked in with finely-split bamboos.

THE fact that skeleton remnants of elephants are so rarely found in any part of Africa is explained by an explorer, who states that as soon as the bones have become brittle from climatic influences they are eaten in place of salt by various ruminant animals.

THE fish is white below and green above, because white is the colour of the light shining through the water, and hence protects him from his enemy below. His back being green makes him, on the other hand, appear from above as part of the green water, and is his safeguard from hawks and other enemies.

IN Havana there is a device for protecting passengers from the extortion of cabmen which might profitably be imitated in other countries. The lamp-posts are painted in various colours—red for the central division, blue for the second circle, green for the third, &c.—and thus the "fare" knows immediately when he has passed the legal boundary, and pays accordingly.

PARAFFIN wax candles and the extreme north-eastern frontier of the Indian Empire appear on first reflection to have but little reflection with each other. The Digboi oil wells, however, situated in a remote corner of Assam, turn out, with their present small refinery and plant, twelve hundred of these candles daily, and should in the course of a few years be capable of meeting any demand for oil and wax that is likely to arise. Recent drilling operations, indeed, afford conclusive evidence that the territory may be made to yield at least five hundred thousand gallons a month of petroleum of excellent quality. There are now four wells at Digboi, and the sight of four jets spouting black oil to a height of seventy feet supplies a striking picture of the resources of these wells. The oil falls into a natural reservoir, one end of which is artificially dammed up, and the supply is considerably in excess of the capacity of the existing refinery to work off; a suitable refinery on a larger scale is already in contemplation. The enterprise has been pushed forward in the face of great expense. Now that these difficulties have at last been successfully overcome, the prosperity of the Assam wells is assured, and the pioneers of the undertaking have every likelihood of reaping a rich harvest for their arduous struggle against malaria and jungle.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

CHARTER.—A warrant holds good for three months.

ALAC.—It is not necessary to have an I O U stamped.

CHARLES.—The word is pronounced as if it spelt core.

L. B.—Pennies have just their face value, nothing more.

A. J.—Anything you try is likely to injure the colour.

A. M.—We fear you will not be successful, but you can try.

ROBIN.—Lord Roberts is Commander-in-Chief in South Africa.

COMMON.—Child born at sea is registered in the birth parish of its father.

QUAKER.—Kimberley is about two hundred miles south of Mafeking.

H. J.—We do not give addresses, but probably at any first-class Italian warehouse.

BON.—Beating the coat will do more to take the dust out than brushing can effect.

BOLA.—Turnips should have a thick rind taken off them, as the outer part is not good.

CHARNAL.—Any height, so long as no one can accidentally receive damage from the glass.

F. F.—Erick them with a pin, and if good the oil will instantly spread around the puncture.

GEOR.—Each colony has its own distinguishing colonial flag; but this is subordinate to the Union Jack.

CHARTER.—Lord Roberts stands about 5 feet 4 inches high; Napoleon same; Nelson also; Wellington 5 feet 8 inches.

H. H.—Crimes war cost Britain 20,656 lives, but not more than twelve out of every hundred in battle, the rest in hospitals.

MIMMANCE.—You cannot be compelled to live with your husband, but if you leave him without good cause you cannot compel him to maintain you.

A. M.—It is merely a slangy way of representing the year 1900; a bank could not be asked to recognise it, and a legal document so marked would be invalid.

M. P.—A holder of the Victoria Cross receives a pension of £10 a year; where the holder is in precarious circumstances, the pension is now increased to £50 a year.

A. V.—Moisten with ammonia-water, lay blotting-paper over, and from dry; if silk, use chloroform to restore colour, or cover with powdered French chalk, and iron.

M. G.—The bride and bridegroom should not meet on the wedding-day until the hour fixed for the ceremony at the church. Both should travel to the church separately.

CLARK.—To clean celery from insects, dissolve a small piece of carbonate of soda in a wineglassful of hot water, add it to a bowl of salt and water, and plunge the celery into this after it has been washed.

A. D.—Spread plenty of powdered borax near where they come out, also force the powder abundantly into the holes and crevices where they retreat during the day. If this plan is persevered in, it gets rid of them in time.

M. N.—First of all moisten the stain with iodine, then use hyperoxide of soda. Next rinse in clean water and dry well, and the stain, if a new one, will often entirely disappear, and even an old one will grow much fainter.

G. N.—Make into a stiff paste some soft soap and rottenstone with water, and let the ingredients dissolve gently by simmering in a hot water bath. Apply by rubbing the paste on with a woollen rag. Finish off with a leather and a little dry whitening.

FATE.—You say you are not in a position at present to support a wife. It would be best to explain the situation frankly to her. The only way to find out whether she loves you or not is to ask her. If she does she will undoubtedly be willing to wait.

BERRY.—Moisten some finely powdered whiting or prepared chalk with ammonia and water, one part of the former to three parts of water. Rub the silver well with this; let nearly dry, and then polish, first with a soft cloth, and then with a camellia leather.

F. S.—The only way we know of is the constant repetition of the word or sentence you wish to teach; do not confuse him by too many words at a time. Some learn quicker than others; while one will learn several words in a few weeks, another may take months or even years before he says a word.

IVORY.—Wash them well in soap and water, using a piece of flannel for the purpose, and while wet expose them to full sunshine under a glass shade; for several days wash them with soapy water two or three times a day, keeping them in the sun as before, and finally wash them again, and they will become beautifully white.

MILK.—The best way to remove inkstains that have dried is to rub them with milk till the stain fades away, changing the milk as it becomes discoloured, afterwards rub with ammonia to remove the grease. Fresh inkstains should be sprinkled with salt, which absorbs the ink, and so prevents the stain from spreading.

LAL.—Cronje was the Boer Commandant who defeated Janssens' force at Krugersdorp, and who, after the surrender, wished to shoot the officers. The Imperial South African Association, 66, Victoria Street, Westminster, will supply you with leaflets and other information concerning the raid.

KIT.—To remove coffee-stains from linen: Lay the stained portion of the cloth over a bowl, and pour boiling water through it. To remove iron rust from linen: Apply tartaric acid, rubbing until stains disappear, then rinse thoroughly; use a little ammonia in first water to counteract acid.

BELL.—You can get a very dark oak stain by making some strong coffee as black as you please. Add to it some iron filings, with a little sulphuric acid and water. Lay this on with a sponge, after cooler acid, allowing it to dry between each application until you get the depth of tint you require.

EVIE.—For rinsing out cloths that have contained meat, and for pans and jugs used for milk, use cold water first. In the former case it will prevent staining, and in the latter it will make the vessels far sweeter than would be possible if hot water were used from beginning to end of the cleaning process.

C. S.—A mixture of equal parts (by bulk) of stale breadcrumbs and finely powdered and sifted chalk, rubbed in with a piece of flannel. The most soiled portions should first be well rubbed, and the mixture used with them thrown away, and then the whole well rubbed over with fresh crumb and chalk mixture till it is quite clean.

BRENDA.—Half an hour would be sufficient to cook most fish, provided the water is hot and ready seasoned. Fish, to be perfect, should be taken to the table the instant it is cooked and dished. Sauces should be made ten minutes before hand. It does not injure any flour sauce to simmer slowly until wanted; that is, if it is made of proper consistency.

THE STORY OF LIFE.

ONLY the same old story, told in a different strain; Sometimes a smile of gladness, and then a stab of pain; Sometimes a flash of sunlight, again the drifting rain.

Sometimes it seems to borrow from the crimson rose its hue; Sometimes black with thunder, then changed to a brilliant blue; Sometimes false as Satan, sometimes as Heaven true.

Only the same old story, but oh, how the changes ring! Prophet and priest and peasant, soldier and scholar and king; Sometimes the warmest hand-clasp leaves in the palm a sting.

Sometimes in the hush of even, sometimes in the mid-day strife; Sometimes with dove-like calmness, sometimes with passion rife; We dream it, write it, live it, this weird, wild story of life.

HOUSEKEEPER.—Boil half a pint of linseed-oil, add one ounce of beeswax, cut very small, and stir till melted. Let cool, and then add a quarter of a pint of spirits of turpentine and a quarter of a pint of vinegar, and mix thoroughly. This should be applied when cold with a flannel, and the furniture thus polished with a soft duster.

A. W.—Mix together one ounce of powdered French chalk and five ounces of powdered pipeclay; make this into a paste by gradually adding two ounces of spirits of wine. Make into balls and dry. To use: Moisten the spots or stains with warm water and rub well with one of the balls, dry in the sun, and brush off, repeating the treatment, if necessary.

SUPERSTITION.—There are many superstitions about salt. Some persons think it is unlucky to spill salt between them and a friend. In Russia it is customary to give bread and salt to a stranger as a mark of friendship; and among the Arabs, as is well known, a man who has eaten salt with another one looks upon him as a friend even if he had been an enemy before.

ANNE.—There is no reason why an old maid's life should not be as helpful to others and as well employed as any man's. There are various means of usefulness in the world, and a woman who has no particular home ties to claim her attention is at liberty to give assistance and help in ways in which a married woman could not. In helping others you will find you help yourself.

MARIE.—Buy some calcined magnesia, and sprinkle it thickly on both sides of the lace. Then gently lay the lace between two sheets of thick white paper, and place it between the leaves of a heavy book, or under a weight, for several days. Then shake off the powder, and the lace should be quite clean, though if it was very dirty you may need to repeat the treatment.

CLARENCE.—The fish must be purchased overnight, and laid in cold water, to which a little vinegar has been added, for twelve to eighteen hours. Be sure it is clean, and place it in cold water in the fish-kettle with just enough water to cover it, but no salt. Bring it slowly to the boil, and let it simmer gently about half an hour, or a little longer. Drain it well, and serve with a hot serviette underneath. Egg-sauce should always accompany this, and, if liked, parsley.

FUELED.—As a rule, it is well to be quite sure that the parties are desirous of being introduced to one another, or, at least, that there could be no objection to such an introduction. There are occasions, of course, when it is difficult to avoid it, in which case the ceremony must be performed; but it is not often that such a case occurs. It is easy enough to avoid introducing people generally, especially nowadays, when meetings are so much more informal than they used to be.

H. H.—A carpenter's duty on board an iron sailing ship are—First, to sound ship, see to water supply, note that cargo hatchways are water-tight, put up abutting boards for cargo if necessary, attend to steering gear, winches, capstan, winches, and all running gear; see that all blocks are properly oiled and running smoothly; second, to repair docks and cabin fittings, attend to breakages, and generally do as much as he can of what is required of him.

GERALDINE.—Provide a saucer of skim milk, some good yellow soap, and a piece of flannel. Spread the gloves on a clean towel, smoothing out creases. Dip the flannel in the milk, and rub a little soap on it. With this rub the gloves, working downwards from the wrists. You will need to rinse the flannel often. When all dirt is removed, lay the gloves without rinsing on a clean dry towel, pulling them as nearly the right shape as possible. When dry they should be soft and glossy.

MATER.—To ice the birthday cake, take the white of one egg, beat it slightly, and add to it by degrees a quarter of a pound of icing sugar and two tablespoonfuls of cold water. Beat well together until perfectly smooth, lay the icing on the cake and spread with a broad knife dipped in hot water. The cake should be put in a cool oven for a few minutes to harden the icing, and it is a good plan to dredge it over with flour before putting on the icing, for this will prevent it from spreading and running off.

COOKIE.—The following is a good receipt for seed cake: Two pounds of flour, half a pound of loaf-sugar, one tablespoonful of thick yeast, half a pint of warm milk, half a pound of cooking butter, one ounce of orange seeds. Mix the loaf sugar, well pounded, with the flour, then mix the yeast with the milk and enough flour to make it the thickness of cream, and pour it into the middle of the flour and sugar, and set it in a warm place for an hour. Melt the butter to an oil, and stir it into the sponge with the orange seeds and sufficient milk to make the dough of middling stiffness, line a tin with buttered paper, put in the mixture and again allow it to rise before the fire, then bake for an hour in a hot oven. When cooked brush the cake over with milk.

UNHAPPY.—Painful as the task may be there is nothing for you to do but tell the young man plainly and straightforwardly that your feelings have undergone a change, and you feel that you have no affection for him, and must, therefore, ask him to release you from your promise. If he is himself responsible for this change of mind on your part, he cannot reproach you, and even should he do so, a little unpleasantness now may well be borne if it is to save you from a lifelong regret, such as an uncongenial marriage must bring about. We are inclined to think you have not altogether been blameless in the matter, as from what you tell us we should say you never really cared for him, and, therefore, had no right to become engaged to be married to him; but as you are now convinced of the mistake you made, the best thing you can do is to break it off as quickly as possible.

META.—The following will probably give you the information you desire as to weights and measures: Sixty drops of liquid make one spoonful. Two teaspoonfuls of liquid make one dessertspoonful. Two dessertspoonfuls of liquid or four teaspoonfuls make one tablespoonful. Four tablespoonfuls of liquid make one wineglassful or two ounces. Sixteen tablespoonfuls of liquid make one pint. Eight tablespoonfuls of liquid make one gill. Two wineglassfuls of liquid make one gill, or one teacupful. One coffee-cupful makes one half pint. A heaped quart, or four coffee-cupfuls of flour, make one pound. A full tablespoonful of flour makes one half ounce. Ten eggs make one pound. One pint or two coffee-cupfuls of granulated sugar make one pound. Two and one-half coffee-cupfuls of pulverised sugar make one pound. One pint of broken loaf sugar is one pound. One tablespoonful of butter is one ounce. One pint of soft butter makes one pound. One coffee-cupful of butter makes one half pound.

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ALL LETTERS to be addressed to the Editor of THE LONDON READER, 20, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

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AWAY UP IN THE AIR.

IN America they have recently been erecting business buildings from fifteen to twenty-four stories high; and the upper floors rent for almost or quite as much as the lower ones.

The possibility of this is, of course, due to the development of the lift, or "elevator," as our cousins over there name it. I personally know of one of these tall buildings, in the *twenty-third* story of which there is a fine and flourishing restaurant. I dined up there one summer day last year, and might have tossed a loaf of bread down on the weather vane of the highest church steeple in the city.

But there! It is the lifting machine that does it. Any arrangement that takes us off the earth, without putting us to trouble and exertion, opens a new area of existence. Do you imagine I should have eaten a chop in the twenty-third story of that Tower of Babel if I had been obliged to climb twenty-two long flights of stairs to get there?

Scarcely; for of all the various ways of making a man's legs ache, and taking the breath out of him, climbing stairs beats the band. There is no better test of the elasticity and toughness of the muscles, and of the conditions of one's heart and breathing apparatus.

All of which brings me round to the spot I ought, perhaps, to have started from—Mrs. Turner and her troubles. She says that for ten years or more she was bothered with indigestion—or dyspepsia, if you care to call it that; it is exactly the same thing. The luxury of a good appetite was to her only a dim and fading memory; she ate as a tired and sleepy sentry walks—only because she had to.

And even then she was punished for it; for after she had taken (most carefully did she select it) a meal of victuals, she was sure to suffer from pain and misery at the stomach, chest and sides.

"My breathing," she says, "alarmed and worried me quite as much as any of the other symptoms of my complaint. Sometimes it almost seemed as if my breath were going altogether out of my body, as a bird flies out of a cage when the door is left open. I got about on the level fairly well, but when I tried

to climb stairs I had to stop and gasp on every step. The effort would set my heart jumping and beating; and I caught mouthfuls of air as you have seen children clutch at bits of down floating through a room.

"In hope of relief I tried one kind of medicine after another, but for years I never had the good fortune to find the right one. I was very, very weak, and did my work only in the half-way fashion that people must do it in, who have the will without the power.

"At length I chanced to read in a newspaper about how persons troubled with the same ailment had been entirely cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup after having suffered as much and as long as I had. I began taking it, and the first bottle did me so much good I felt convinced it would help me out. I continued using the Syrup, and in a little time it did for me what the paper said it had done for so many other afflicted ones.

"I became able to eat and digest, and my breathing got to be as free and easy as when I had no disease to depress and half suffocate me. I could go up stairs quickly and lightly as a girl. I slept well and gained strength with every dose of this wonderful remedy. I am now in excellent health, and give all the credit to Mother Seigel's Syrup."—Mrs. Mary Turner, Ragg Cottage, Alswere, South Molton, March 17, 1899.

"Five years," writes another, "I went through the wretchedness of indigestion. I had pain at the chest, and all the other symptoms and consequences of that common and dreadful complaint. Nothing did me any good until I began using Mother Seigel's Syrup. This speedily cured me, and I have never had the trouble since. I know of nothing that is so sure and quick in breaking up a cold as the Syrup."—Mrs. Charlotte Snodin, 52, Hunter Street, Northampton, January 24, 1899.

It is all of a piece. Whether we want to work at this, that, or the other; to dig ditches or climb stairs we must get the digestion right; and *there* is where Mother Seigel's Syrup has a place pretty much to itself.

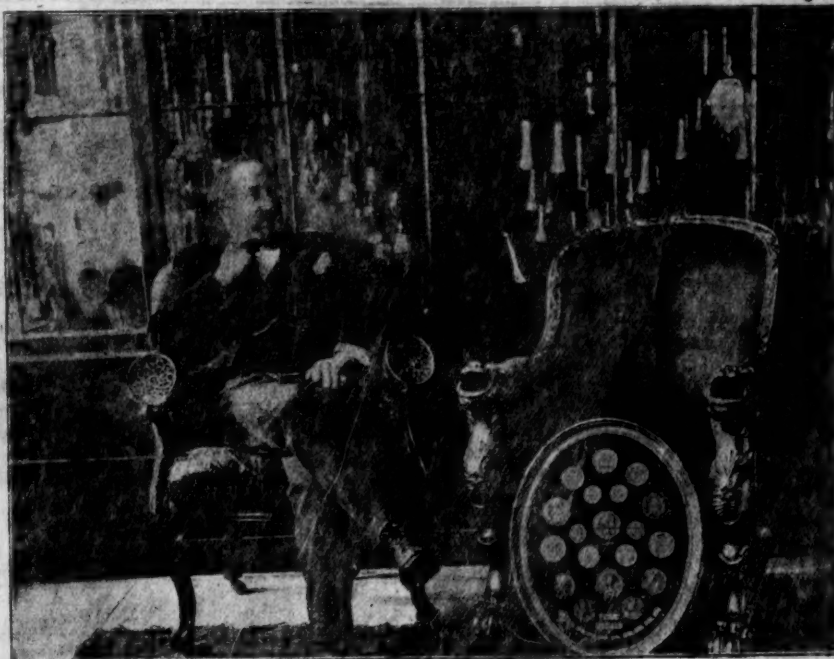
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